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Gods and the World



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*To Jossy,
who recently passed away in Auroville.
She took great care in the preparation of this monograph.*

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Illumination, Heroism and Harmony

Gods and the World



General Editor: KIREET JOSHI

Uday - Gopi



1970 - 1971

Illumination, Heroism and Harmony

Preface

The task of preparing teaching-learning material for value-oriented education is enormous.

There is, first, the idea that value-oriented education should be exploratory rather than prescriptive, and that the teaching-learning material should provide to the learners a growing experience of exploration.

Secondly, it is rightly contended that the proper inspiration to turn to value-orientation is provided by biographies, autobiographical accounts, personal anecdotes, epistles, short poems, stories of humour, stories of human interest, brief passages filled with pregnant meanings, reflective short essays written in well-chiselled language, plays, powerful accounts of historical events, statements of personal experiences of values in actual situations of life, and similar other statements of scientific, philosophical, artistic and literary expression.

Thirdly, we may take into account the contemporary fact that the entire world is moving rapidly towards the synthesis of the East and the West, and in that context, it seems obvious that our teaching-learning material should foster the gradual familiarisation of students with global themes of universal significance as also those that underline the importance of diversity in unity. This implies that the material should bring the students nearer to their cultural heritage, but also to the highest that is available in the cultural experiences of the world at large.

Fourthly, an attempt should be made to select from Indian and world history such examples that could illustrate the theme

of the upward progress of humankind. The selected research material could be multi-faceted, and it should be presented in such a way that teachers could make use of it in the manner and in the context that they need in specific situations that might obtain or that can be created in respect of the students.

The research team at the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIER) has attempted the creation of the relevant teaching-learning material, and they have decided to present the same in the form of monographs. The total number of these monographs will be around eighty to eighty-five.

It appears that there are three major powers that uplift life to higher and higher normative levels, and the value of these powers, if well illustrated, could be effectively conveyed to the learners for their upliftment. These powers are those of illumination, heroism and harmony.

It may be useful to explore the meanings of these terms – illumination, heroism and harmony – since the aim of these monographs is to provide material for a study of what is sought to be conveyed through these three terms. We offer here exploratory statements in regard to these three terms.

Illumination is that ignition of inner light in which meaning and value of substance and life-movement are seized, understood, comprehended, held, and possessed, stimulating and inspiring guided action and application and creativity culminating in joy, delight, even ecstasy. The width, depth and height of the light and vision determine the degrees of illumination, and when they reach the splendour and glory of synthesis and harmony, illumination ripens into wisdom. Wisdom, too, has varying degrees that can uncover powers of knowledge and action, which reveal, in turn, unsuspected secrets and unimagined skills of art and craft of creativity and effectiveness.

Heroism is, essentially, inspired force and self-giving and sacrifice in the operations of will that is applied to the quest, realisation and triumph of meaning and value against the resistance of limitations and obstacles by means of courage,

battle and adventure. There are degrees and heights of heroism determined by the intensity, persistence and vastness of sacrifice. Heroism attains the highest states of greatness and refinement when it is guided by the highest wisdom and inspired by the sense of service to the ends of justice and harmony, as well as when tasks are executed with consummate skill.

Harmony is a progressive state and action of synthesis and equilibrium generated by the creative force of joy and beauty and delight that combines and unites knowledge and peace and stability with will and action and growth and development. Without harmony, there is no perfection, even though there could be maximisation of one or more elements of our nature. When illumination and heroism join and engender relations of mutuality and unity, each is perfected by the other and creativity is endless.

This particular monograph reflects on the relation between the Gods and the world. The question of the workings of the gods in the world is complex, and this monograph does not aim at a philosophical discussion of the question.

Do gods exist? What is the relationship between gods and God?

What is the relationship between human beings, gods and God? If the students are inspired to raise these questions and to explore them with the help of philosophers and other competent scholars, the material given in this monograph will find its justification, as indeed our aim is to inspire exploration.

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Gods and the World

Introduction

Man's dedication to the quest for meaning is certainly as old as his existence on earth, and the belief in gods, in whatever form, has been present in all cultures of the world since time immemorial, even though questioned and denied from time to time. Carl Jung,¹ the father of depth psychology, viewed Man's urge towards transcendent meaning as an instinct sui generis in the human psyche, or as he would say, "an innate predisposition of mankind."*

*All over the world, the spiritual foundation of a society is reflected in a body of myths which are symbols of human experience each culture values and preserves because they embody its world-view or important beliefs. In the words of Mircea Eliade, a well-known historian of religions, myths are always the reflection of a genuine religious experience and, in his view, it is the sacred experience that gives them their structure, utility and universality. "Myths", he says, "express figuratively and dramatically what metaphysics and theology define dialectically."^{**}*

Myths may explain origins, natural phenomena and death. They may provide models of virtuous or heroic behaviour by

* *Sui generis*: adj., of its own kind.

** Dialectically: adj., using discussion and reasoning as a method of intellectual investigation.

relating the adventures of great heroes, or they may describe the nature and function of divinities. They impart a feeling of awe for whatever is mysterious and marvelous in life, depicting a universe in which human beings take their place in a much larger scale, and may reveal much more deeply than any rationalistic rendering the very structure of the divinity; divinity who, as is so much stressed in all oriental religions, stands beyond all attributes, and gathers all contraries. "God is day and night, winter and summer; war and peace, hunger and satiety: all opposites are in him," would say Heraclitus,² a Greek philosopher of the 5th century BC. The questions myths address have produced a body of stories from diverse cultures that often closely resemble each other in subject, although the treatment of each theme naturally varies from one society to another. Forming a bridge across time and space, they are like an open window on the mind of the people who created them, allowing us to better access deeper layers of their psyche. Sri Aurobindo, in his preface on the philosophy of the Upanishads, beautifully describes the differences he sees between the Asiatic and European mind. Digging into the rich soil of the epics which are at the roots of these two main lines of development, he writes: "The mind of the European is an Iliad and an Odyssey,³ fighting rudely but heroically forward, or full of a rich curiosity, wandering as an accurate and vigorous observer in landlocked seas of thought; the mind of the Asiatic is a Ramayan or a Mahabharat, a gleaming infinity of splendid and inspiring imaginations and idealism, or else a universe of wide moral aspiration, ever new masses of thought."

As we have seen, an inherent part of myths is the belief in one or more powers that create life and control the direction of the Universe.

The ancient world contained a multitude of coexisting religious ideas and forms. Various forms of monotheism⁴ (both female-dominated or male-dominated), polytheism,⁵ nature worship, ancestor worship are found all over the world. A general tendency had long been to see the evolution of the religious

phenomena from "simple to complex" starting with the most elementary religious forms like totemism or fetishism, cults of nature and animism and evolving, as man and societies were becoming more civilized, towards polytheism to finally reach a monotheistic notion of god. For many scholars now and in particular for Mircea Eliade, it is a very simplified viewpoint and, as he often points out in his treatise on religious history, this hypothesis has never been proved. "A simple and linear representation is always a selection more or less arbitrary; nowhere will we find a simple religion reducible to elementary hierophanies." Everywhere even in the most primitive and ancient cult, religious life is always much more complex."

It is certainly not for us in such a small format to study such rich and enormous material. Many books have been published on this fascinating subject and a few are suggested at the end of this monograph for interested students. We will limit ourselves to look into two systems of gods which have been very well defined, the Greek system and the Indian system.

Three texts, which are part of the literary material that have greatly influenced the cultural and spiritual development of Western or Eastern people to his day, are presented here. Our first text, The Colloquy of Indra and Agastya, has been selected out of the Rig Veda and is followed by a very enlightening commentary from Sri Aurobindo who consecrated many years of his life to unravel "the secret of the Veda". Our second text is an excerpt from the Kena Upanishad.

If Veda and Upanishads are the roots of Indian civilization and the supreme authority in Hindu religion, ancient Greece gave soil for the rich crop of religious imagination that has shaped the mind of the Western world. Our third text thus is taken out of the Iliad, one of the two famous epics written by Greece's greatest poet, Homer, and which, together with the Odyssey, has probably been the most read poem for the past three thousand years. Finally to conclude this monograph, we have included an excerpt from Sri Aurobindo's long poem Ilion, inspired by the Iliad and in which the Olympian gods are presented in all their depth and beauty.

Greece and India both have produced a luxuriant mythology and an abundant pantheon. If the Greek gods belong now to the past, having been dethroned by Christianity, and are more to us figures of art and poetry, the Indian gods are still very much alive. For the Indians have always tended to retain their early beliefs and mould them in such a way as to mirror new social conditions or to fit them into a new philosophical scheme. Moreover, the oldest Vedic hymns have affirmed the ultimate Reality of the One Supreme Being and some various gods and goddesses as cosmic manifestation of the One.*

*Greek religion was essentially polytheistic, and no other religion has ever been so anthropomorphic.** “Every object or force of sky or earth, every blessing and every terror, every quality – even the vices – of mankind were personified as a deity, usually in human form and animating power. Every craft, profession and art had its divinity and in addition, there were demons, harpies, furies, gorgons, sirens, nymphs almost as numerous as the mortals of Earth.” (Will Durant, History of Civilizations – Vol II) This animism, which corresponds to the subtle perception that no plan of existence is without form and animating power, is a remarkably universal feature in the religious culture of the ancient world, and similarly even wood-gods, river-gods, mountain-gods, house-gods, tree deities, snake deities peopled the world of ancient India.*

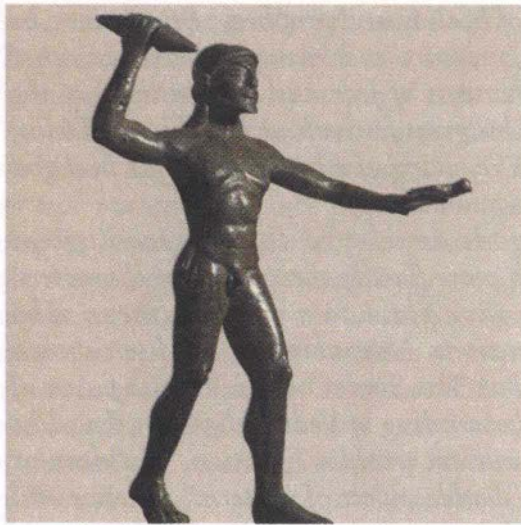
But the great gods of the Vedas, as well as the Olympians belonged to a much higher order. They were great powers, supporting universal laws and functions, and were not bound by life and matter.

In Greece, already at the time of Homer, the gods had developed deep moral and psychological functions.

Zeus, very similar in some aspects to the Vedic god Indra, Lord of the sky and Illumined Intelligence, was Lord of wind, rain and storms, and of thunder – The Thunderer became one of his most

* Pantheon: n., the gods of people, especially the officially recognized gods.

** Anthropomorphic: adj., described or thought of as having a human form or human attributes (deities).



A Greek bronze of Zeus bearing a thunderbolt

familiar epithets, and the thunderbolt,⁷ symbolic of his supreme creative power, was his main attribute. He had united in himself all the attributes of the supreme divinity. He was “The Father of all”, head and source of the moral order of the world, the mighty ruler of gods and men. He was omnipotent, saw and knew everything. His daughter Athena, “born from his head fully armed”, in whom some scholars have seen a personification analogous to the Vedic Saraswati, but who had been most probably a storm and lightning goddess – hence her normal attribute, the aegis, which in primitive time signified “the stormy night” and her epithet as “Goddess of the brilliant eyes” – was venerated in her quality of Warrior Goddess who protected the brave and the valorous, and as the goddess of learning and wisdom. Her wisdom which earned her the epithet *pronoia* (the foreseeing) made her the counselor goddess and the goddess of the assembly.

Even more worshiped than Athena was Apollo, son of Zeus by Leto, goddess of the night. Apollo was the solar god – without being the sun himself, which was represented by a special divinity, Helios. Apollo had assumed high moral qualities. He was honoured as patron of music, art, and poetry; as founder of cities,

maker of laws and as god of healing and prophecy. Everywhere he was associated with order, measure and beauty; whereas in other cults there were strange elements of fear and superstition, in the worship of Apollo, and in his great festivals at Delphi and Delos, the dominant note was the rejoicing of a brilliant people in a god of health and wisdom, reason and song.

In India the Vedic gods developed their psychological functions but retained also more fixedly their external characters, and for higher purpose, gave place to a new pantheon who assumed larger cosmic functions. Nowadays, as has been shown by Sri Aurobindo in his book *The Secret of the Veda*, a factor of main importance and understanding of Vedic religion is that, like in so many cultures of the ancient world – Egyptian, Chaldean or Greek, to name a few – a double aspect of exoteric* practice and esoteric** symbolism has been one of its fundamental characteristics. The Veda belongs to that age of mysteries⁸ in which men of a deeper knowledge and self-knowledge established their practices, significant rites, symbols and secret lores within or on the borders of a more exterior religion. That was also certainly true for Greece whose highly moralized Homeric gods were but very exterior aspects of its religion. Its deeper life fed itself on the mystic rites of Orpheus,⁹ Dionysus,¹⁰ and the Eleusinian mysteries,¹¹ all deeply rooted in antiquity and whose initiations were kept very secret. And if we do not know the fundamentals of the Orphic initiation, we do know its preliminaries: vegetarianism, asceticism, purification and religious instruction through sacred books – *heroî logoi* – which remind us very much of Indian yoga.

The Veda, properly read, is fundamentally a record of mystic and occult experiences, intuitions and revelations. One deep perception the Vedic seers had was that nothing could happen in this world without relation to some force or being in some worlds behind, nor that there could be any material, vital or mental

* Exoteric: adj., related to the outside, external. Suitable to be imparted to the public.

** Esoteric: adj., designed for or understood by the specially initiated alone.

movement except as the expression of a life and a soul behind. They perceived or conceived of a series of worlds, particularly of the mind and the overmind, and even of a supramaterial world. The Vedic gods had their permanent dwelling in the supramental world. As Sri Aurobindo would say, "The gods of the Rig Veda are not material Nature powers but great world deities with complex functions material, mental and spiritual. The same Agni who burns here in fire, is master of pure force in the mind and of simple active energy in the universe. The same Surya who rides yonder in the skies, is the master of inspired knowledge and the principle of illumination wherever it is found. The same Varuna who in ether upholds the stars and finds a pathway for the sun, is in the soul the master of majesty, self control, law and calm and by these functions maintains the order of the Universe. The same Usha who dawns rosily on the verge of the material heaven, is the goddess of the soul's expansion and presides over the evolution of what we shall be out of what we are."

As for the Greek gods and goddesses, Sri Aurobindo in his *Ilion* puts forth their philosophical functions. Paris, when confronting the Trojan assembly, describes some of them beautifully:

... earth resists but my soul in me widens
 Helped by the toil behind and the age-long effort of Nature.
 Even in the worm is a god and it writhes for a form and an outlet.
 Workings immortal obscurely struggling, hints of a godhead
 Labour to form in this clay a divinity. Hera widens,
 Pallas aspires in me, Phoebus in flames goes battling and singing,
 Ares and Artemis chase through the fields of my soul in their
 hunting.
 Last in some hour of the fates a Birth stands released and
 triumphant...

But we shall have some more insights into these Greek gods and goddesses in a long extract that we are presenting from Sri Aurobindo's *Ilion*.

* * *

Notes

1. **Carl Jung (1856-1936):** a Swiss psychiatrist and one of the founders of psychoanalysis. Jung was a very original and innovative thinker. A disciple of Freud in his early years, he soon separated from him and developed his own practice. His main contribution, amongst others, has been the now widely recognized concept of the existence of a universal collective unconscious we can see reflected in the myths and fairy-tales of the peoples all over the world and in the dreams of many individuals.
2. **Heracleitus:** Heracleitus was born to a noble family in Ephesus around 530 BC and died, probably of dropsy* in his seventies. He lived most of his life like a hermit in the mountains, and expressed his views in pithy** and enigmatical apophthegms*** on nature, which he deposited in the temple of Artemis.
Heracleitus' philosophy is certainly one among the major products of the Greek mind. The first nucleus of his thought was the oneness of all that is, with fire at its core. All things are one, he said, and everything is a form of fire. (By identifying fire with soul and God, he used the term symbolically as well as literally.)
The second important element in his philosophy was the eternity and ubiquity of change. *Panta rei, ouden menei*. All things flow, nothing abides.
The third element was the unity of opposites, the interdependence of contraries, the harmony of strife. God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger. All these contraries are stages in a fluctuating movement, moments of ever-changing fire.
3. **The Iliad and the Odyssey:** Great epic poems composed by Homer. The Iliad is the earliest written work of ancient Greece. It tells us the story of the siege of Troy. Scholars believe that Homer composed it as a young man in the middle of the 8th century BC.
The Odyssey: It is believed that if the Iliad was a product of Homer's

* Dropsy: n. Edema, an abnormal excess accumulation of serous fluids in connective tissues.

** Pithy: adj. Having substance, concise.

*** Apophthegm: n. Aphorism; concise statement of a principle.

youth, the Odyssey arose out of his old age. It describes the ten-year long and difficult journey back to the home of Odysseus, one of the heroes in the Iliad. It is primarily a superb adventure story and, contrary to the Iliad which remains in the real world, it includes many elements of folklore (giants, monsters, sorceress; etc.).

4. **Monotheism:** Doctrine or belief that there is but one God. There are various forms of monotheism; one conceives of God as the ruler of the world while another sees in God the creator as well as the ruler of the world. Another form of monotheism is monism. Monism maintains that god is also the stuff of the world. According to monism He is like the spider which makes its web out of itself. This is the basic thought of India, Vedic thought and Upanishadic thought.
5. **Polytheism:** Belief in or worship in more than one god.
6. **Hierophanies:** n. Sacred revelation. A hierophant was a priest in ancient Greece and more specifically the high priest in the Eleusinian mysteries.
7. **The thunderbolt:** The thunderbolt or lightning is celestial fire as an active force, terrible and dynamic. The thunderbolt of Parabrahman, the fire-ether of the Greeks is a symbol of the supreme creative power. In the majority of religions we find that the Godhead is hidden from man's gaze, and then, suddenly, the lightning flash reveals Him momentarily in all his active might. This image of the logos* piercing the darkness is universal. The Thunderbolt, or Vajra, is one of the major symbols in Buddhist iconography,** signifying the spiritual power of Buddhahood (indestructible enlightenment) which shatters the illusory reality of the world.
8. **Mysteries:** By the time of the Periclean*** enlightenment, the most

* Logos: Divine wisdom manifest in the creation. In Greek philosophy the logos or reason, was the controlling principle of the universe

** Iconography: Traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject and especially a religious or legendary subject.

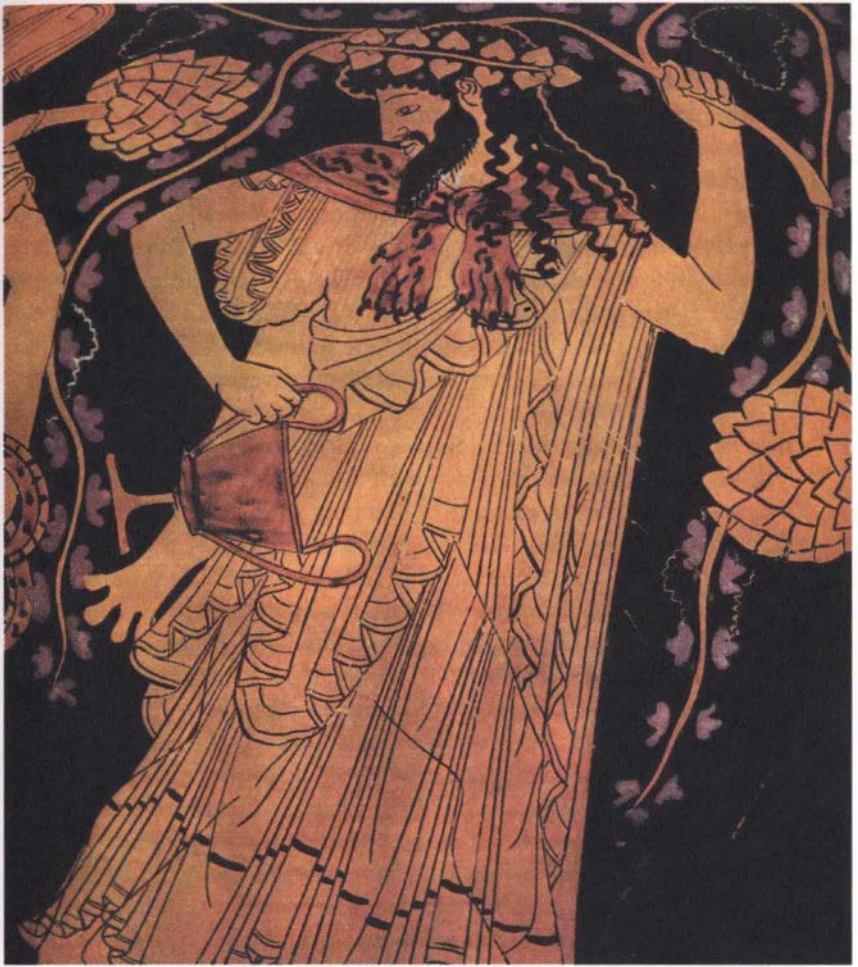
*** Pericles: (492-429 BC) Athenian statesman, champion of Athenian democracy. Under his leadership Athens went through a very prosperous and enlightened period.

vigorous element in Greek religion was the “Mystery”. In the Greek sense, a mystery was a secret ceremony in which sacred symbols were revealed, symbolic rites were performed, and only initiates could participate.

9. Orpheus: The great Greek dramatist Aeschylus, 525-456 BC, describes Orpheus as he who “haled all things by the rapture of his voice.” Vase painting shows him playing the lyre, surrounded by birds, wild beasts or his Thracian disciples. He is pictured as a gentle spirit, tender, meditative, affectionate. According to legend, Orpheus lived and died in Thrace, sometimes a musician, sometimes a reforming ascetic, priest of Dionysus. Legend tells us that he married the nymph Eurydice whom he passionately loved. One day she was mortally bitten by a snake. Heartbroken, Orpheus resolved to descend in the underworld to reclaim her. He was able to charm Persephone with his lyre and was allowed to take his wife back to Earth on the sole condition that he should not turn to look at her. They had almost reached the gates of Hades when Orpheus, overcome with anxiety lest she should not be following, looked back. Immediately Eurydice vanished, this time forever.



Orpheus playing the lyre surrounded by wild beasts



The god Dionysus, represented here with some of his symbols, the ivy crown, the panther-skin cloak, the grapevine and the drinking cup

Thracian women, resenting his unwillingness to console himself with them, tore him to pieces in one of their Dionysian revels. The severed head, still singing, was buried at Lesbos in a cleft that became a famous oracle.

Orpheus was known primarily as “founder of initiation and mystery”; He became the symbol and the patron of a whole

movement at once initiatory and popular known by the name of Orphism, which trend of thought closely followed that of India.

According to the great Orphic myth, man was represented as a compound of the ashes of Dionysus and the titans.

The soul (Dionysus factor) was divine, but the body (titan factor) held it in bondage. The watchword therefore was "Soma, Sema" – *the body, a tomb*. Hence incarnate existence was more like a death, and the death of the body the beginning of true life. However this "true life" was not obtained automatically. The soul was judged according to its merits and its faults and after a certain time incarnated again. As in India, there was a belief in the indestructibility of the soul, condemned to transmigrate until its final deliverance.

10. **Dionysus:** Etymologically Dionysus means "The Zeus of Nisa." And he seems by several similarities of legend and function to be the Greek form of the Vedic god Soma. It is normally accepted that the cradle of his cult was Thrace. The exuberance of the legends of Dionysus is explained not only by his great popularity but because he absorbed within himself many other foreign deities. The identification of Dionysus with the Cretan god Zagreus introduces, under the influence of Orphic mysticism, a new element in the legend of the god; that of the passion of Dionysus.

Son of Zeus and Demeter (or sometimes of Kore), Dionysus-Zagreus was torn to pieces by the Titans who threw the remains of his body into a big caldron. Pallas Athena however was able to rescue the god's heart which she brought to Zeus. With the still beating heart Zeus created Dionysus while Zagreus became an underworld deity, who in Hades, welcomed the souls of the dead and helped them with their purification. Dionysus, the god who, in Plutarch's* words is destroyed, who disappears, who relinquishes life and then is born again became for the Greeks the symbol of everlasting life.

11. **Eleusinian mysteries:** The Eleusinian mysteries were certainly the most ancient mysteries performed in Greece. Of pre-Achaean origin, they were initially an autumn festival of plowing and sowing based on the legend of Demeter and Kore.

"One day Kore, Demeter's daughter, was gathering flowers in the

* Plutarch: (ca AD 46- 120) Greek biographer and moralist.

fields of Nysa when she suddenly noticed a narcissus of striking beauty. She ran to pick it, but as she bent down to do so the earth gaped open and Hades appeared. He seized her and dragged her with him into the depths of the earth. There he made her his queen, and she took the name of 'Persephone'. Demeter meanwhile had heard her child's despairing cry for help. Then, says the poet of the Homeric hymns, bitter sorrow seized her heart. Over her shoulders she threw a somber veil and flew like a bird over land and sea, seeking here, seeking there. At last, on Hecate's advice, she went to consult Divine Helios who revealed to her the name of her daughter's ravisher.

After roaming the earth Demeter retired at Eleusis. There she prepared for mankind a cruel and terrible year in which the earth refused to give forth any crops. Then would the entire human race have perished of cruel, biting hunger if Zeus had not intervened. Zeus sent his son Hermes to Hades, and he obtained from him the promise that he would return young Kore to her mother. But, before sending her back, Hades tempted her to eat a few seeds of pomegranate and, as this fruit was a symbol of marriage, their union became indissoluble. As a compromise Zeus decided that Persephone should live with her husband one-third of the year and pass with her mother the other two-thirds."

Thus was explained why each year, when the cold season arrived, the earth took up an aspect of sadness and mourning. It was the moment when Persephone went to join her husband into the deep shadows; but when sweet-scented spring came, the earth put on her mantle of a thousand flowers to greet the return of Kore.

In February, each year, the return of Kore was celebrated in what was called, *The Lesser Eleusinia*, festival that was held near Athens. *The Greater Eleusinia* took place in Eleusis every five years in September. During this festival the *Mystai* or initiates were admitted into the hall of initiation where secret ceremonies were performed. In the age of Peisistratus* the legend of Dionysus-Zagreus was superimposed on the myth of Demeter; but through all forms the basic ideas of the mysteries remained the same: As the seed is born again, so may the dead have renewed life and not only the dreary, shadowy existence of Hades, which was part of a more traditional viewpoint.

* Peisistratus: Athenian tyrant – 527 BC.



Agastya, Darasuram temple, photo Olivier Barot

The Colloquy of Indra and Agastya

Rig Veda I.170

*na nunamasti no svah kastadveda yadadbhutam,
anyasya cittamabhi samcarenyamutadhitam vi nasyati. 1.*

Indra

1. It is not now, nor is It tomorrow; who knoweth that which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and action in the consciousness of another, but when It is approached by the thought, It vanishes.

*kim na indra jighamsasi bhrataro marutastava,
tebhih kalpasva sadhuya ma nah samarane vadhih. 2.*

Agastya

2. Why dost thou seek to smite us, O Indra? The Maruts are thy brothers. By them accomplish perfection; slay us not in our struggle.

*kim no bhrataragastya sakha sannati manyase,
vidma hi te yatha manosmabhyaminna ditsasi. 3.*

*aram kŗnvantu vedim samagnimindhatam purah
tatramrtasya cetanam yajñam te tanavavahai. 4.*

Indra

3. Why, O my brother Agastya, art thou my friend, yet settest thy thought beyond me? For well do I know how to us thou wilt not to give thy mind.
4. Let them make ready the altar, let them set Agni in blaze in front. It is there, the awakening of the consciousness to Immortality. Let us two extend for thee thy effective sacrifice.

*tvamisise vasupate vasunam tvam mitranam mitrapate
dhesthah
indra tvam marudbhih sam vadasvadha prasana rtutha
havimsi. 5.*

Agastya

5. O Lord of substance over all substances of being, thou art the master in force! O Lord of Love over the powers of love, thou art the strongest to hold in status! Do thou, O Indra, agree with the Maruts, then enjoy the offerings in the ordered method of the Truth.

Commentary

The governing idea of the hymn belongs to a stage of spiritual progress when the human soul wishes by the sheer force of Thought to hasten forward beyond in order to reach prematurely the source of all things without full development of the being in all its progressive stages of conscious activity. The effort is opposed by the Gods who preside over the universe of man and of the world and a

violent struggle takes place in the human consciousness between the individual soul in its egoistic eagerness and the universal Powers which seek to fulfil the divine purpose of the Cosmos.

The seer Agastya, at such a moment, confronts in his inner experience Indra, Lord of Swar, the realm of pure intelligence, through which the ascending soul passes into the divine Truth.

Indra speaks first of that unknowable Source of things towards which Agastya is too impatiently striving. That is not to be found in Time. It does not exist in the actualities of the present, nor in the eventualities of the future. It neither is now nor becomes hereafter. Its being is beyond Space and Time and therefore in Itself cannot be known by that which is in Space and Time. It manifests Itself by Its forms and activities in the consciousness of that which is not Itself and through those activities it is meant that It should be realised. But if one tries to approach It and study It in Itself, It disappears from the thought that would seize It and is as if It were not.

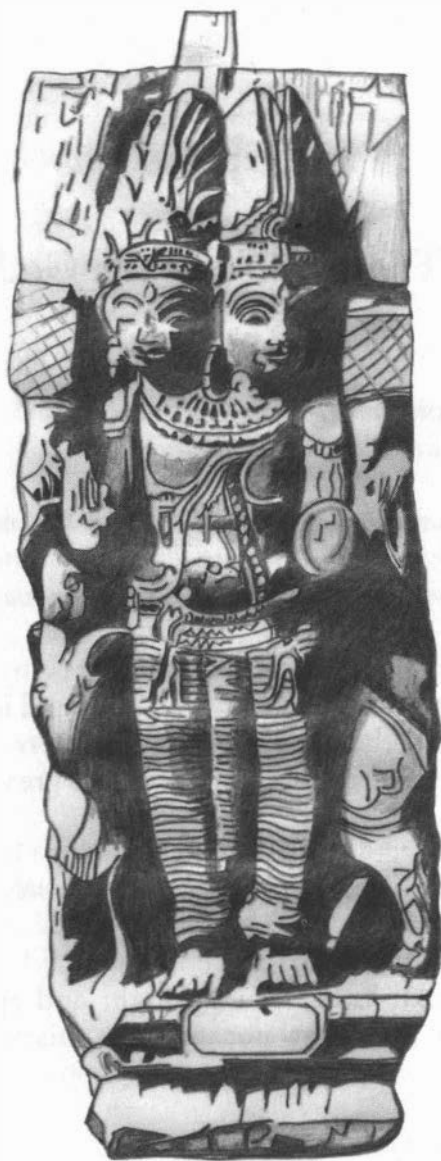
Agastya still does not understand why he is so violently opposed in a pursuit which is the eventual aim of all being and which all his thoughts and feelings demand. The Maruts are the powers of Thought which by the strong and apparently destructive motion of their progress break down that which is established and help to the attainment of new formations. Indra, the Power of pure Intelligence, is their brother, kin to them in his nature although elder in being. He should by their means effect the perfection towards which Agastya is striving and not turn enemy nor slay his friend in this terrible struggle towards the goal.

Indra replies that Agastya is his friend and brother, – brother in the soul as children of one Supreme Being, friend as comrades in a common effort and one in the divine love that unites God and man, – and by this friendship and alliance has attained to the present stage in his progressive perfection; but now he treats Indra as an inferior Power and wishes to go beyond without fulfilling himself in the domain of the God.

He seeks to divert his increased thought-powers towards his own object instead of delivering them up to the universal Intelligence so that it may enrich its realisations in humanity through Agastya and lead him forward by the way of the Truth. Let the egoistic endeavour cease, the great sacrifice be resumed, the flame of the divine Force, Agni, be kindled in front as head of the sacrifice and leader of the march. Indra and Agastya together, the universal Power and the human soul, will extend in harmony the effective inner action on the plane of the pure Intelligence so that it may enrich itself there and attain beyond. For it is precisely by the progressive surrender of the lower being to the divine activities that the limited and egoistic consciousness of the mortal awakens to the infinite and immortal state which is its goal.

Agastya accepts the will of the God and submits. He agrees to perceive and fulfil the Supreme in the activities of Indra. From his own realm Indra is supreme lord over the substances of being as manifested through the triple world of mind, life and body and has therefore power to dispose of its formations towards the fulfilment, in the movement of Nature, of the divine Truth that expresses itself in the universe, – supreme lord over love and delight manifested in the same triple world and has therefore power to fix those formations harmoniously in the status of Nature. Agastya gives up all that is realised in him into the hands of Indra, as offerings of the sacrifice, to be held by him in the fixed parts of Agastya's consciousness and directed in the motion towards fresh formations. Indra is once more to enter into friendly parley with the upward aspiring powers of Agastya's being and to establish agreement between the seer's thoughts and the illumination that comes to us through the pure Intelligence. That power will then enjoy in Agastya the offerings of the sacrifice according to the right order of things as formulated and governed by the Truth which is beyond.

Excerpts from *The Secret of the Veda*, by Sri Aurobindo,
Centenary Edition (Pondicherry: 1972) pp. 253-56.



Agni

The Upanishads

The Parable of the Gods

The Kena Upanishad (third part)

*brahma ha devebhyo vijigye tasya ha brahmano vijaye deva
amahiyaanta,
ta aiksantasmakamevayam vijayo smakamevayam
mahimeti. 1*

1. The Eternal conquered for the gods and in the victory of the Eternal the gods grew to greatness. This was what they saw, "Ours the victory, ours the greatness."

*taddhaisam vijajñau tebhyo ha pradurbabhuvā
tanna vyajanata kimidam yaksamiti. 2.*

2. The Eternal knew their thought and appeared before them; and they knew not what was this mighty Daemon.

*tegnimabruvan jataveda etadvijanihi
kimetadyaksamiti tatheti. 3.*

3. They said to Agni, "O thou that knowest all things born, learn of this thing, what may be this mighty Daemon," and he said, "So be it."

*tadabhyadravattamabhyavadatkosityagnirva
ahamasmityabravijjataveda va ahamasmiti. 4.*

4. He rushed towards the Eternal and It said to him, "Who art thou?" "I am Agni," he said, "I am he that knows all things born."

*Tasmimstvayi kim viryamityapidam sarvam daheyam
yadidam prthivyamiti. 5.*

5. "Since such thou art, what is the force in thee?" "Even all this I could burn, all that is upon the earth."

*Tasmai trnam nidadhavetaddaheti tadupapreyaya sarva
javena tanna sasaka dagdhum
sa tata eva nivavarte naitadasakam vijñatum yadetadyak
samiti. 6.*

6. The Eternal set before him a blade of grass; "This burn," and he made towards it with all his speed, but he could not burn it. There he ceased, and turned back; "I could not know of It, what might be this mighty Daemon."

*atha vayumabruvan vayavetadvijanihi kimetadyaksamiti
tatheti. 7.*

7. Then they said to Vayu, "O Vayu, this discern, what is this mighty Daemon." He said, "So be it."



Surya, Khajuraho, photo O. Barot

*tadabhyadravattamabhyavadat kositi vayurva
ahamasmitiyabravinmatarisva va ahamasmiti. 8.*

8. He rushed upon That; It said to him, "Who art thou?" "I am Vayu," he said, "and I am he that expands in the Mother of things."

*tasmimstvayi kim viryamityapidadam sarvamadadiya
yadidam prthivyamiti. 9.*

9. "Since such thou art, what is the force in thee?" "Even all this I can take for myself, all this that is upon the earth."

*tasmai trnam ndadhavetadadatsveti tadupapreyaya
sarvajavena tanna sasakadatatum
sa tata eva nivavarte naitadasakam vijñatum
yadetadyaksamiti. 10.*

10. That set before him a blade of grass, "This take." He went towards it with all his speed and he could not take it. Even there he ceased, even thence he returned; "I could not discern of That, what is this mighty Daemon."

*athendramabruvanmaghavannetadvijanihi
kimetadyaksamiti
tatheti tadabhyadravat tasmattirodadhe. 11.*

11. Then they said to Indra, "Master of plenitudes, get thou the knowledge, what is this mighty Daemon." He said, "So be it." He rushed upon That. That vanished from before him.

*sa tasminnevakase striyamajagama bahusobhamanamumam
haimavatim tam hovaca kimetadyaksamiti. 12.*

12. He in the same ether came upon the Woman, even upon Her who shines out in many forms, Uma daughter of the snowy summits. To her he said, "What was this mighty Daemon?"

Fourth Part

*sa brahmeti hovaca brahmano va etadvijaye mahiya
dhvamiti tato
haiva vidañcakara brahmeti. 1.*

1. She said to him, "It is the Eternal. Of the Eternal is this victory in which ye shall grow to greatness." Then alone he came to know that this was the Brahman.

*tasmadva ete deva atitaramivanyandevanyadagnir
vayurindraste hyenannedistham pasparsuste
hyenatprathamo vidañcakara brahmeti. 2.*

2. Therefore are these gods as it were beyond all the other gods, even Agni and Vayu and Indra, because they came nearest to the touch of That...*

*tasmad va indrotitaramivanyandevansa hyenannedistham
pasparsa sa hyenatprathamo vidañcakara brahmeti. 3.*

* By some mistake of early memorisers or later copyists the rest of the verse has become hopelessly corrupted. It runs, "They he first came to know that it was the Brahman", which is neither fact nor sense nor grammar. The close of the third verse has crept into and replaced the original close of the second.

3. Therefore is Indra as it were beyond all the other gods because he came nearest to the touch of That, because he first knew that it was the Brahman.

*tasyaisa adeso yadetadvidyuto vyadyutada
itinnyamimisada ityadhidaivatam. 4.*

4. Now this is the indication of That, – as is this flash of the lightning upon us or as is this falling of the eyelid, so in that which is of the gods.

*athadhyatmam yadetad gacchativa ca manonena caitad
upasmaratyabhiksnam sankalpah. 5.*

5. Then in that which is of the Self, – as the motion of this mind seems to attain to That and by it afterwards the will in the thought continually remembers It.

*taddha tadvanam nama tadvanamityupasitavyam sa ya
etadevam
vedabhi hainam sarvani bhutani samvañchanti. 6.*

6. The name of That is “That Delight”; as That Delight one should follow after It. He who so knows That, towards him verily all existences yearn.

*upanisadam bho bruhityukta ta upanisad
brahmim vava ta upanisadamabrumeti. 7.*

7. Thou hast said “Speak to me Upanishad”;* spoken to

* *Upanishad* means inner knowledge, that which enters into the final Truth and settles in it.

thee is Upanishad. Of the Eternal verily is the Upanishad that we have spoken.

*tasyai tapo damah karmeti pratistha vedah sarvangani
satyamayanam. 8.*

8. Of this knowledge austerity and self-conquest and works are the foundation, the Vedas are all its limbs, truth is its dwelling place.

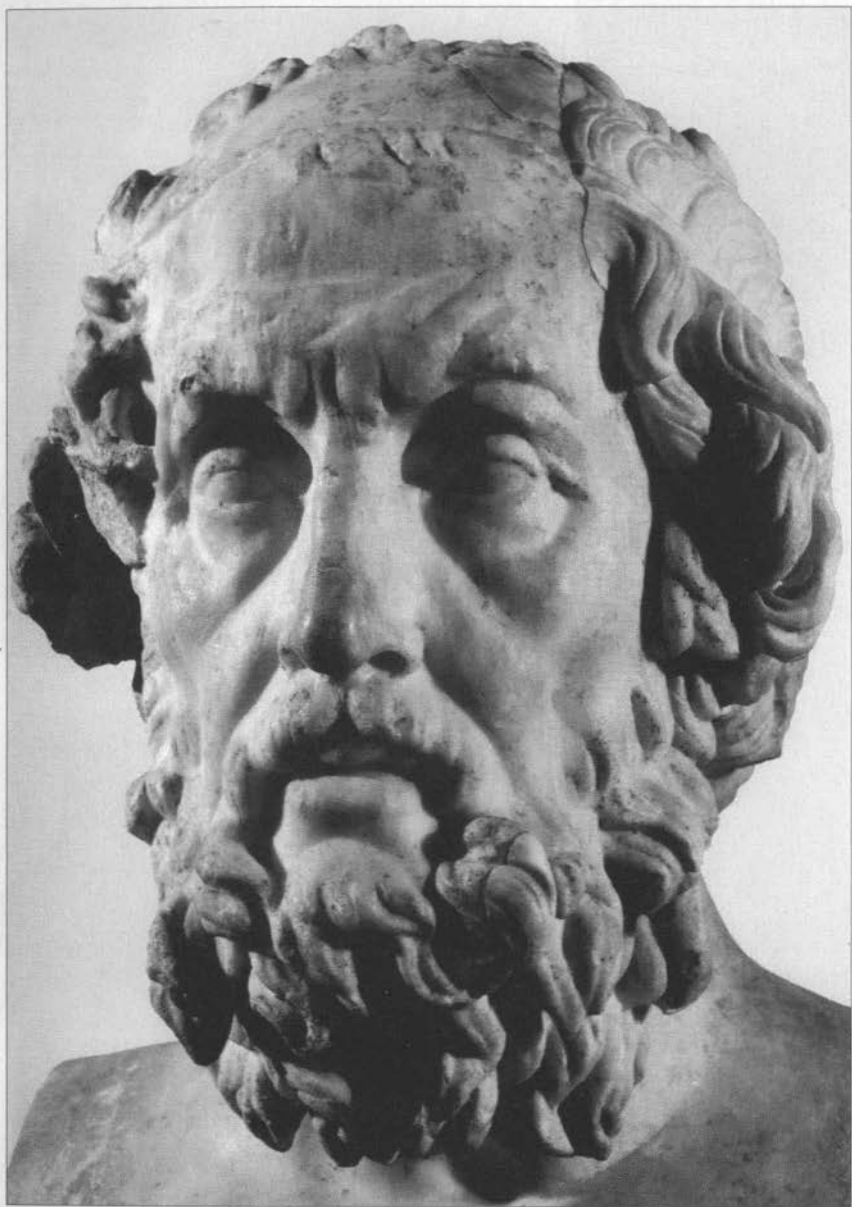
*yo va etamevam vedapahatya papmanamanante svarge
loke
jyeye pratisthati pratisthati. 9.*

9. He who knows this knowledge, smites evil away from him and in that vaster world and infinite heaven finds his foundation, yea, he finds his foundation.

Taken from *The Upanishads*, by Sri Aurobindo
(Centenary Edition, Pondicherry: 1972), pp. 8-11.







A bust of the epic poet Homer (2nd century BC)

The Iliad

Introduction

The earliest examples of Greek literature are two epic poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey, which most scholars today agree to attribute to one single great poet, Homer.

Both epics were written down sometime in the 8th century BC. During this period the Greeks, after a long dark age following the collapse of the Mycenaean culture in the 12th century BC, had once again developed a civilisation complex enough to need writing and had learned alphabetic script from the Phoenicians.¹ Despite the acquisition of writing these Greeks lagged far behind the Mycenaeans. Politically they were less organised, and technologically they were more primitive – for example chariots no longer existed in Greece at the time of Homer. However, they possessed an elaborate oral tradition.

According to tradition, the goddess of memory as well as of poetry inspired the poet to tell his tales, and successive generations of trained poets learned and taught a wealth of literary material orally. In keeping with the oral tradition, Homer created the Iliad and the Odyssey by taking building blocks of material from the poets who preceded him and reshaping them to form the foundations of his artistic creation. These blocks included various myths about the gods and about heroes of old (the fathers of the heroes of the Trojan War), myths about the war with Troy and its various participants, from long before the start of the war until

the last of the heroes had returned home. He furthermore, set passages describing scenes of sacrifice, fighting and funerals and particular descriptive phrases, called epithets, that describe gods, people and nature – as examples among many, Zeus is Lord of lightning, the Thunderer, Lord of the gathering gale; Poseidon, the great shaker of shores, creator of earthquake, Lord of the main;* Hermes is, luck bringing, and Aphrodite, adorer of smiles. In the same vein, he writes of swift-footed Achilles and noble, long-suffering Odysseus.

It is assumed that Homer came from Asia Minor and was probably born on the island of Chios, or possibly in the city of Smyrna. A guild of poets did exist on Chios and in his hymn to Apollo, Homer sings of: "A sightless man on stony Chios/All whose poems stand capital." From these lines and the fact that both the bards in the Iliad and the Odyssey are blind, it has been suggested that Homer was most probably blind himself.

By the 6th century BC, the Greeks attributed both the Iliad and the Odyssey to Homer, and it is possible that the authoritative edition of the Odyssey existed in Athens at that time. Numerous papyrus fragments of both epics exist dating from the 4th century BC. However, the oldest complete manuscripts of the Iliad and the Odyssey we have today date from the 10th century AD.

Homer may have been the first historian of ancient Greece. Archaeologists assume that a war against Troy actually occurred, although the remains they have found of that particular Troy are trifling compared to Homer's description of Priam's great city.

The city did burn in 1184 BC which is the accepted date of its destruction. Soon after, due to the Dorian² conquest, Greece fell into a long dark age out of which, many centuries later, emerged one of the most creative nations of the Ancient world.

Why are the poems of Homer so universal in significance and perennial** in appeal? First he tells a good story and tells it well. The Homeric hero becomes so real to us that we can easily

* main: high sea.

** Perennial: persistent, enduring.

identify with him, gaining insights into our own feelings and goals. Human behavior and the emotions that cause it obviously fascinated Homer; never will he tell us what his characters are like, instead he reveals their personalities by actively involving us in their moments of crisis. Therefore the opening lines of the Iliad state that his focus will be the anger of Achilles and the devastation it caused all the Greeks who were fighting against Troy. In keeping with this perspective, Homer's style is dramatic rather than narrative. As a poet and as a singer what he sings is "tragic joy" or, as Rachel Besspaloff says "what he exalts and sanctifies is not the triumph of victorious force but Man's energy in misfortune, the dead warrior's beauty, the glory of the sacrificed hero..."

When the Iliad opens the Achaeans have been sieging the city of Troy for more than nine years. The declared motive of the war had been the abduction of Helen, beautiful wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta, by Paris, prince of Troy. To avenge this deception the whole of the Achaean forces, under the commandership of Agamemnon, Menelaus' brother and king of Mycenae, had left for Troy. We are told in one of Aeschilus's play "Agamemnon" of the tragic story of Agamemnon's daughter, Iphigenia, who was to be sacrificed at Aulis, a place of strong winds and dangerous tides, where the Greek fleet met. Only her death, it was said could ensure a safe crossing.

For nine years victory had wavered, now to this side now to that. Then a quarrel flared between Agamemnon and Achilles, son of Peleus and the sea-goddess Thetis, and for a time it turned the tide in favor of the Trojans. Again, the reason was a woman.

Agamemnon had received Chryseis, daughter of Apollo's priest, as a price of honor, and when her father came, offering him great treasures for her release, he had refused. The priest then prayed to Phoebus Apollo, the mighty god he served, and Phoebus Apollo heard him. From his sun-chariot he sent fiery arrows and men and animals perished of a pestilence, in great numbers.

Achilles then conveyed an assembly of the Greek chieftains in which the prophet Calchas revealed that the release of Chryseis

was the only way to appease the angry god. Agamemnon had to agree but he was greatly angered and vowed that if he had to give back his price of honor he would have another in her stead. Therefore when Chryseis was returned to her father, he sent his squires to Achilles' tent to take away from him the captive Briseis, Achilles' own price of honor. Deeply humiliated Achilles retaliated by withdrawing from battle and this decision resulted in needless suffering and death among the Greeks.

The war by now had reached Olympus. The gods were ranged against each other. Aphrodite was on the side of Paris, Hera and Athena against him. Ares, god of war, always took side with Aphrodite, while Poseidon, Lord of the sea, favored the Greeks, a sea people and great sailors. Apollo helped the Trojans for the sake of Hector, son of Priam and mainstay of Troy, and Artemis, his sister, did so too. Zeus, for his part, tried to stay neutral, but, urged by Thetis, who cruelly wounded by her son's dishonor wanted a Trojan victory, agreed to help and sent a false dream to Agamemnon promising him victory. Instead, at the end of the day, and after dreadful fighting, the Trojans had driven the Greeks almost back to their ships.

There was great rejoicing in Troy that night, but grief and despair in the Greek camp and Agamemnon himself was all for giving up and sailing back to Greece. His advisers though counseled him to apologize to Achilles, and Agamemnon finally accepted to send him back Briseis and many other splendid gifts if only he would rejoin the Greek ranks and keep Hector from burning their ships but Achilles still refused his help.

Not until his beloved friend Patroclus finds his death at the hands of Hector will Achilles return to the battlefield. He will finally kill Hector, and the Iliad ends up abruptly with Hector's funerals.

From other sources, we learn that this doesn't mark the end of the Trojan War. Achilles himself will be killed by Paris who, favored by Apollo, aims a fatal arrow at his only weak point, his heel, and Paris in turn will meet his death at the hands of an other Greek warrior, Philoctates.

As legend goes, mighty Troy will never be taken by force but fall victim of a stratagem played on her by the Greeks.

"Crafty Odysseus" convinced the dispirited army to build up a huge wooden horse, deceitfully dedicated to Athena, in which hollow stomach warriors could be hidden, and to leave it on the beach. Then the Achaean fleet took to the sea and hid out of Troy's view. The Trojans, persuaded that the Greeks had sailed away, and fearing Athena's anger, took the horse within their walls. At night, when everybody was asleep, Odysseus and other soldiers came out and opened the gates to the rest of the army.

When morning came, what had been the proudest city in Asia was fiery ruin.

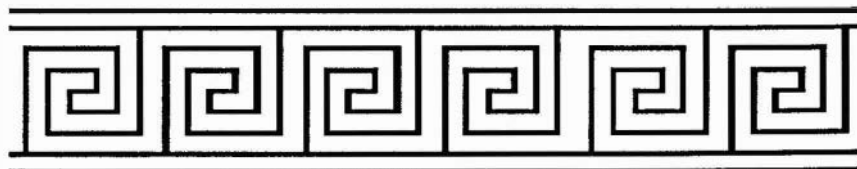
As the invocation of the Iliad says, "the will of Zeus was done".

The excerpt presented here is taken out of book 20, "The Gods at War." Earlier in the story, the gods, on Zeus' demand, had withdrawn from the battlefield. They are now conveyed to come to an assembly on mount Olympus and asked to help once more, now that Achilles has joined the conflict.

I have indeed called this gathering of the immortals
Because of my deep concern for those warriors, doomed
Though they are. I myself, of course, will stay on a ridge
Of Olympus, from which I may watch the war as I please.
But all of you other immortals go down and help
The Achaeans and Trojans, aiding which ever side you prefer.

...

Thus the happy gods greatly augmented the clash
Of battle and made strife break out everywhere
Between the two armies fighting in horrible uproar.



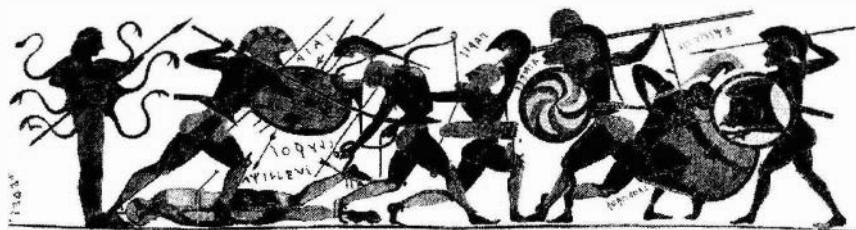
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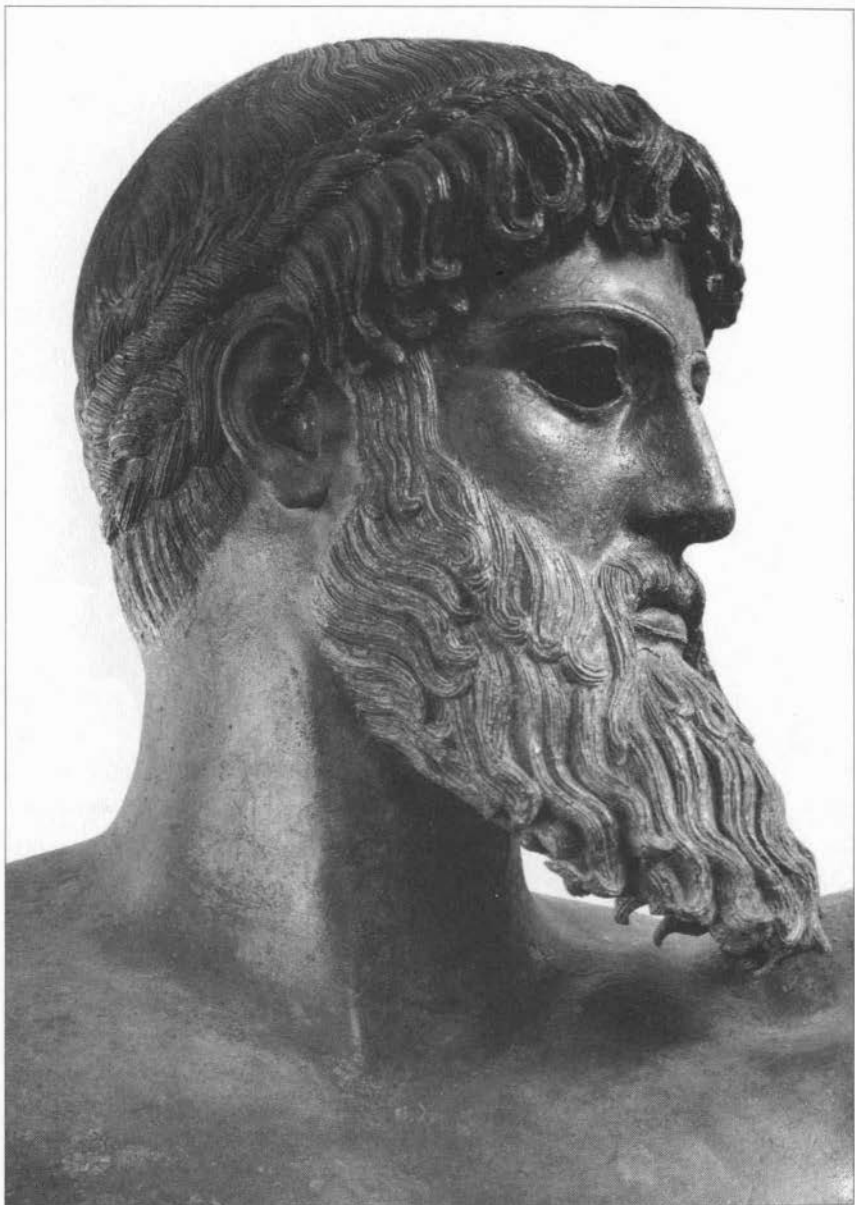
1. **Phoenicians:** The Phoenicians were the greatest traders of the ancient world, and they dominated Mediterranean trade from 1200 BC to 300 BC. Originally living on the fertile coasts of the eastern Mediterranean, in what is now Syria and Lebanon, they developed important trading centres in various parts of the Mediterranean, the most important being Carthage in North Africa.

In the *Aeneid*, the Latin poet Virgil tells how Aeneas, guided by his mother, the great goddess Aphrodite, leaves Troy in flames, with his family and other Trojan refugees, and after many adventures, finds refuge in Carthage where he meets Dido, the great queen who founded it.

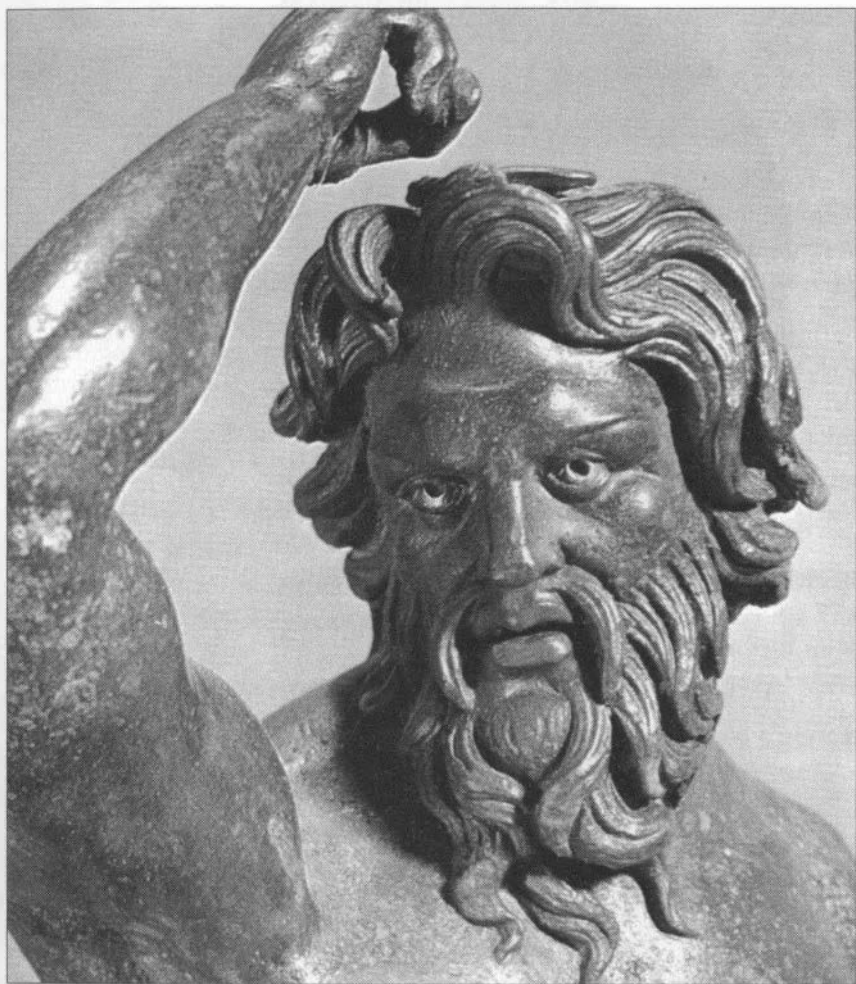
Virgil (70 BC-19 BC) who has for centuries been acknowledged as the greatest Roman poet, used the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as the basis for his great epic, the *Aeneid*, in which he glorifies Rome. Aeneas has been always considered the heroic ancestor whose descendants would one day found this beautiful city.

2. **The Dorians:** coming down from the North through Illyria and Thessaly, the Dorians invaded the Peloponnesus about the year 1104 BC. They almost completely destroyed the Mycenaean culture. Still in the herding and hunting stage, they had one thing in quantity though: iron. The hard metal of their swords gave them a merciless supremacy over Achaeans and Cretans (inhabitants of the island of Crete) who still used weapons made of bronze. The result of their conquest was a long and bitter interruption in the development of Greece.





Zeus



Poseidon, the brother of Zeus and the Lord of the seas, was also the Master of the Horses.

The Gods at War

Excerpt from the Iliad by Homer

*Not on the tramp of the multitudes, not on the cry of the legions
Founds the strong man his strength but the god he carries within him.*

Extract from Talthybius' discourse to the Greek army
Ilion – The Book of Achilles

Thus beside the beaked ships and all around you,
O war-starved Achilles, Achaeans armed for the fight,
And up the plain from them the Trojans did likewise.
But powerful Zeus, from the many-ridged peak of Olympus,
Bade Themis call the gods to a meeting, and quickly
She went to them all and summoned them to the assembly
At Zeus' palace. Not one river-god was absent
Except Oceanus, nor any nymph, of all those
Who haunt the lovely groves, the springs where rivers
Rise, and the grassy fields. Once there at the house
Of the cloud-gathering god, all the immortals took seats
Within the rows of bright columns which skillful Hephaestus
Had made for Zeus their Father.
Nor did earth-shaking
Poseidon ignore Themis' call, but emerged from the brine*

* The brine: the sea.

To join them. And now he sat in their midst and inquired
About Zeus's purpose: "Why, O lord of the lightning,
Have you called this meeting of gods? Are you worried about
The Achaeans and Trojans, between whom battle is almost
Ready to blaze?"

Then Zeus of the gathering gale
Answered him thus: "You're right, great shaker of shores,
I have indeed called this gathering of the immortals
Because of my deep concern for those warriors, doomed
Though they are. I myself, of course, will stay on a ridge
Of Olympus, from which I may watch the war as I please.
But all of you other immortals go down and help
The Achaeans and Trojans, aiding whichever side
You prefer. For if fast-fighting Achilles attacks
The unaided Trojans, they won't be able to hold out
A moment. They've never been able to so much as see him
Without fear and trembling, and now that flaming rage
For the death of his friend is eating his heart, I'm afraid
He will outstrip his fate by leveling the walls of the city."

These words of Cronos' son Zeus awoke stubborn war,
And the gods went down to join their differing favorites
Hera and Pallas Athena went to the ships
Of the Argives, and with them Poseidon and luck-bringing
Hermes,
The wildest god of all. And with these went Hephaestus,
Exulting in might, for though he limped, his thin legs
Were nimble enough. But huge bright-helmeted Ares
And Apollo with hair unshorn went down to the Trojans,
Along with arrow-showering Artemis, Leto,
The river-god Xanthus, and Aphrodite, adorer
Of smiles.

So long as the gods were not there, the Achaeans
Won glorious victory, since now Achilles, who had

For so long stayed out of the painful fighting, had come forth
Again, and there was no Trojan whose legs did not tremble
At sight of quick-footed Achilles, flaming in arms
Like the man-maiming War-god himself. But when the

Olympians

Entered the tumult, host-harrying Hatred arose
With a vengeance. Athena screamed her great war-cry, now
From beside the deep trench outside the wall, now
From the surf-beaten shore of the sea, and, opposite her
Dread Ares, ominous as a dark whirlwind, screamed
From the citadel heights, and again as he charged down the
slope

Of Callicolone beside the banks of Simoeis.

Thus the happy gods greatly augmented the clash
Of battle and made bitter strife break out everywhere
Between the two armies fighting in horrible uproar.
Then from on high the Father of gods and men
Awesomely thundered, while down below Poseidon
Caused the limitless earth to rumble and quake
From plain to sheer mountain peaks. Well-watered Ida
Was shaken from bottom to top, as were the city
Of Troy and ships of Achaea. Hades, god
Of ghosts in the world under ground, was filled with panic
And sprang from his throne with a scream, lest Poseidon, shaker
Of earth, should split the ground open above him and thus
Reveal to men and immortals the ghastly abodes
Of death, the moldering* horrors that even the gods
Would look on with loathing.

Such was the mighty uproar
When god clashed with god in strife. For against lord Poseidon
Stood Phoebus Apollo, god of the winged shafts,
And opposite Ares stood bright-eyed Athena. Opposing

* Moldering: crumbling to dust; decaying.

Hera was Phoebus' sister, the archer Artemis,
Goddess of golden shafts and the echoing shouts
Of the chase, while coming forth against Leto was powerful
Luck-bringing Hermes, and there opposing Hephaestus
Came the god of the great deep-swirling river,
Called Xanthus by the immortals, Scamander by men.

So gods advanced to meet gods. But Achilles had interest
In none but Priam's son Hector, with whose blood
He most lusted to glut the battling Ares, him
Of the tough hide shield. Host-urging Apollo, however,
Inspired great strength in Aeneas and sent him to face
The raging son of Peleus. Assuming the form
And voice of Priam's son Lycaon, Apollo,
Son of Zeus, spoke thus to the counselor of Trojans:

"Aeneas, where now are the brags you made to the princes
Of Troy when you, over wine, declared yourself ready
To fight man to man with Peleus' son Achilles?"

To which Aeneas: "Lycaon, why would you tell me
This way to fight face to face, against my will,
With haughty Achilles? Not that it would be
My first encounter with him, since once already
He put me to flight with his spear, driving me down
From Mount Ida where he had come for our cattle the time
He sacked and laid waste Lyrnessus and Pedasus both.
That time Zeus saved me by giving me strength and putting
Great speed in my legs. Else I would surely have died
At the hands of Achilles and those of Athena, who went
Before him bearing the light of victory and bidding him
Kill with his bronze-headed spear both Trojans and Leleges.
May no man, then, fight face to face with Achilles,
For always beside him a god goes, warding off death.
And even unaided his spear flies very straight,
Nor does it stop save deep in the flesh of some mortal.

Still, were God to give us an equal chance
In man-to-man combat, he would not easily beat me,
Not though he claims to be made of solid bronze!”

Then lord Apollo, son of Zeus, replied:
“Heroic Aeneas, why don’t you also invoke
The gods everlasting? After all, men say Aphrodite,
Daughter of Zeus, is your mother, while surely Achilles
Was born of a lesser goddess. Remember, your mother
Is Zeus’s own daughter, his the sea-ancient’s child.
But on! Charge with your unyielding bronze straight at him,
And don’t be turned aside by any insults
Or threats from him.”

So saying, he breathed great power
Into Aeneas, and he, the people’s shepherd,
Strode out through the front line of fighters, his bronze
helmet flashing.

Nor was the son of Anchises unnoticed by Hera
As out he went through the moil* of men to face
The son of Peleus. Calling her friends about her,
The goddess spoke thus:
“Poseidon, Athena, you two
Consider what we should do now. Here comes Aeneas,
Flaming in bronze, set on by Phoebus Apollo
To face Achilles in fight. But come, let us
Turn him back at once, or else let one of us stand
By the side of Achilles and give him great power too.
Nor should we allow his spirit to fail at all,
That he may know beyond doubt that we who love him
Are the best of immortals, while those who have hitherto
warded

Defeat from the Trojans are deities worthless as wind.
Here we have come from Olympus to mix in this melee

* Moil: big confusion; bustle.

And keep Achilles safe all this day long,
Though afterward he shall suffer whatever Fate spun
For him with the thread of his life on the day his mother
Bore him. But if he fails to learn all this
From heaven itself, he may be unduly afraid
When some god confronts him in battle. For hard indeed
Are the gods to look upon when they appear
In their own true forms."

And Poseidon, creator of earthquakes,
Replied: "Hera, don't rage beyond what is wise.
It hardly becomes you. I myself would not wish
To hurl gods together in hate, and anyway we
Are much too strong for those others. Rather, let us
Go apart from the battle to where we can sit down and watch,
And war shall be for mortals. However, if Ares
Or Phoebus Apollo should start anything, or should they
Hold back Achilles and keep him from fighting, then quickly
Fierce war shall come from us too. And very soon then,
I believe, those others shall leave the battle and join
The gods on Olympus, defeated by our forceful hands!"

So saying, Poseidon, god with the blue-black hair,
Led the way straight to the mighty bulwark of earth
That the Trojans and Pallas Athena had heaped up high
For godlike Heracles, that he might retreat behind it
Whenever the huge sea-monster, sent by Poseidon
To lay waste the land of the Trojans, drove him back
From the beach to the plain. There the gods with Poseidon
Sat down and wreathed their shoulders with cloud that could
not
Be dispelled, while opposite them the gods backing Trojans
Sat down on the brow of Callicolone round you,
O daring Apollo, and Ares, taker of towns.

Thus both parties sat in council, both uneager

To enter the sorrowful conflict, though high-throned Zeus
Had bidden them to.

Meanwhile, the whole plain was aflame
With bronze-flashing men and horses, and earth resounded
And rang beneath the tumultuous beat of their feet
As they charged toward each other. But now their two
greatest champions
Came out in the space between the two armies, spoiling
To battle each other, Aeneas, son of Anchises,
And noble Achilles. First came Aeneas, defiantly
Tossing his heavy-helmeted head, gripping
His gallant shield close in front of his chest, and brandishing
Fiercely his bronze-headed spear. Against him Achilles,
Son of Peleus, came charging on like a lion,
A ravenous beast that all the men of a village
Have come out anxious to kill. At first he pays them
No heed, but goes his way till one of the fast
And lusty young spearmen sinks a lance in his flesh.
Then with a jaw-splitting roar he gathers himself
To charge, and foam forms all round his fangs, while in him
His great heart groans. Lashing his ribs and flanks
With his tail, he works himself up for the fight, then charges
Straight on in his fiery-eyed fury, careless of whether
He kill or be killed there in the front line of spearmen.
So now Achilles was driven on by his fury
And warrior's pride to go out and face great Aeneas.
And when they had come sufficiently near each other,
Fast-footed royal Achilles spoke to him thus:

"Tell me, Aeneas, why have you come out so far
From the ranks to stand and confront me? Can it be
That your heart is ambitious and fills you with hope of soon
Replacing King Priam as lord of the horse-taming Trojans?
What folly! for even if you should kill and strip me,
Priam would not give the kingship to you. King Priam

Has sons of his own, and his mind is sound, not silly!
Or have the Trojans laid out an estate for you
Greater than any other, acres of orchard
And plowland for you to enjoy – if you should happen
To kill me, that is. Not easy, I think, you'll find
That assignment. For surely I now recall a day
Some time ago when I routed you with my spear.
Don't you remember, Aeneas, when you were alone
And I made you leave your cattle and hurtle headlong
Down the slopes of Mount Ida? Not so much as one little
look

Did you cast behind you that day as you ran. From there
You fled to Lyrnessus, which I attacked with the help
Of Athena and Father Zeus and sacked it completely,
Leading the women off no longer free.

Zeus and the other gods saved you that time, but not
This day, I believe, will they save you again, as you
Undoubtedly think they will. So I myself warn you
Not to confront me, but lose yourself in the crowd
Before you suffer disaster. Once it occurs,
It will be too late for you not to play the fool!"

And Aeneas answered him, saying: "Son of Peleus,
Don't think to scare me with words, as if I were some
Little boy, since I am at least the equal of you
When it comes to hurling insults. We both know who
Each other is with regard to parents and lineage,
For though neither one of us ever laid eyes on the other's
Dear parents, we've both heard the stories which mortal men
Have passed down from days gone by. Men say you're the son
Of matchless Peleus and that your mother is Thetis,
She of the beautiful braids, a child of the brine.
But I claim descent from courageous Anchises, my father,
And Aphrodite herself! And of these two couples,
One or the other shall this day mourn a dear son,
For I don't think we two shall part and leave this struggle

With nothing exchanged but infantile prattle. But if
You really would hear who I am, listen and learn
What many know already. First of all
Cloud-gathering Zeus begot Dardanus, who founded
Dardania

Before sacred Ilium ever went up in the plain
As a city for mortals, who lived at that time on the slopes
Of well-watered Ida. And Dardanus too had a son,
King Erichthonius, one who lived to become
The richest man in the world. He had a herd
Of three thousand horses that grazed in the low-lying
meadows,

Spirited mares with fine little colts beside them.
With these as they grazed the North Wind fell deeply in love,
And changing himself to a glossy-maned black stallion
He sired twelve colts on them. These, when they galloped
The grain-giving earth, could cross in their sport a field
Of ripe barley without so much as disturbing a kernel,
And when they cavorted across the broad back of the brine,
They would skim the high waves that break on the gray salt-sea.
Erichthonius, then, begot Tros, King of the Trojans,
And Tros had three matchless sons – Assaracus, Ilus,
And godlike Ganymède, the best looking boy ever born,
So handsome the gods caught him up to Olympus, that he
Might live with them there and be the cupbearer of Zeus.
And Ilus in turn begot peerless Laomedon, father
Of Priam, Tithonus, Clytius, Lampus, and Hicetaon,
Scion* of Ares. And Assaracus' son was Capys,
Who sired Anchises, who next begot me, and Priam
Begot Prince Hector. Such is my lineage, Achilles,
And the blood I claim to be of.

“But as for prowess
In battle, Zeus gives it or takes it away as he,

* Scion: young member of a family, especially a noble one.

The almighty, sees fit. So come, let us no longer
Stand here in the midst of battle prating like two
Little boys. There is surely no lack of insults for either
Of us to mouth, vile things so many they'd sink
A ship of two hundred oars. For the tongue of man
Is a glib and versatile organ, and from it come many
And various words, whose range of expression is wide
In every direction. And the sort of words a man says
Is the sort he hears in return. But what makes the two of us
Wrangle and nag like a couple of spiteful women,
Who having aroused in each other heart-eating hatred
Go out in the street and spit harsh words back and forth,
As many false as true, since hateful rage
Does the talking? For since I am eager for combat, you'll not
Turn me back with mere words before we have battled with
bronze

Man to man. Come then, let us at once have a taste
Of each other's spear-points!"

He spoke, and drove his huge lance
 Into Achilles' dread and marvelous shield,
 Which loudly cried out about the bronze point of the weapon.
 Achilles, gripped with quick terror, shoved the shield out
 With his powerful hand, away from his flesh, for he thought
 The long-shadowing spear of great-hearted Aeneas would
 easily

Pierce it – childish fool that he was not to know
In his mind and heart that the glorious gifts of the gods
Will not easily break or give way before the onslaught
Of mortals. Nor did the huge lance of fiery Aeneas
Tear through the shield, for the gold, the god's gift, held it
back.

Though he drove it clean through the first two layers, there
 Three other folds, for the great limping god had hammered
 Together five layers in all, two bronze, two tin,

And between them a gold one, in which the ashen spear
stopped.

Then great Achilles let fly his long-shadowing spear
And struck the round shield of Aeneas not far from the rim
Where the bronze and backing of bull's-hide were thinnest.

And the shield

Gave out a strident shriek as through it tore
The shaft of Pelian ash. Then Aeneas was gripped
With panic, and cringing he held the shield up, away
From his flesh, as the spear shot over his back and stilled
Its force in the ground, though it split apart two circles
Of the Trojan's man-guarding shield. Having thus escaped
The long lance, Aeneas stood up, and the sight of that shaft
So close to his flesh filled his bright eyes with measureless
Panic and pain. But Achilles whipped out his keen blade
And charged down upon him, ferociously screaming his
war-cry,

And mighty Aeneas picked up a huge stone, one
That no two men of today could even lift
But that he picked up with one hand and easily threw.
Then Aeneas would surely have struck with the stone the
helmet

Or life-saving shield of charging Achilles, who then
Would have closed with him and taken his life with the sword,
If Poseidon had not been keeping sharp watch. At once
He spoke thus mid the gods everlasting:

"Truly my grief
Is great for high-souled Aeneas, who soon indeed
Shall go down to Hades' halls, killed by Achilles
For heeding the word of far-working Apollo childish
Fool that he was! For Apollo will not keep sad death
From him for a moment. But why should that innocent man
Suffer woes that belong to others, he who has always
Given such pleasing gifts to the sky-ruling gods?

So come, let us save him from death, for Zeus himself
Will be angry if now Achilles cuts the man down.
It is surely already decreed that Aeneas shall outlive
The war, so that Dardanus' seed may not die and his line
Disappear, since Zeus adored Dardanus more than he did
Any other child he had by a mortal woman.
For now Cronos' son has come to despise the house
Of Priam, and surely the mighty Aeneas shall soon rule
The Trojans, and after him the sons of his sons,
Great princes yet to be born."

Then heifer-eyed Hera,
Queen of the gods, replied: "O shaker of shores,
You must decide for yourself concerning Aeneas,
Whether you wish to save him or let him be killed,
Despite his great prowess, by Peleus' son Achilles.
For we two, Pallas Athena and I, have sworn
Very numerous oaths in the presence of all the immortals
That we would never keep from the Trojans the hard day
Of doom, not even when Troy shall burn with furious
Fire lit by the warlike sons of Achaeans."

When Poseidon heard this, he went alone through the fight
Mid a tumult of hurtling spears till he came to Aeneas
And famous Achilles. Quickly he covered the eyes
Of Peleus' son with mist, then drew from the shield
Of Aeneas the sharp ashen spear. This he laid down
At the feet of Achilles, but Aeneas he swept from the ground
And sent him vaulting high over the heads of numerous
Heroes and horses till finally he came down
Far out on the edge of the charge-churned chaos of battle
Just where the Caucones were arming themselves for the fray.
There earthquake-making Poseidon drew close to his side,
And his word's came winged with warning:

"Aeneas, what god

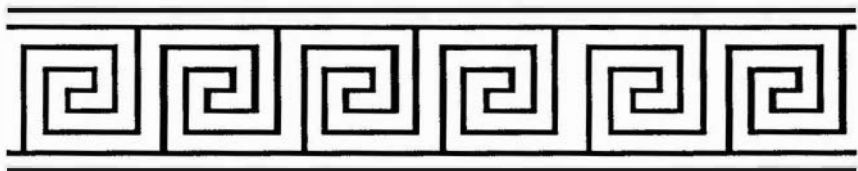
Commands you to fight in such blind rage with the high-
hearted

Son of Peleus, who is both stronger than you
And dearer to the immortals? Rather, give ground
Whenever you meet him, or you before your time
Will enter the house of Hades. But after Achilles
Collides with his own dark fate and dies, then summon
Your courage to fight their greatest champions, for none
Of the other Achaeans will ever be able to kill you."

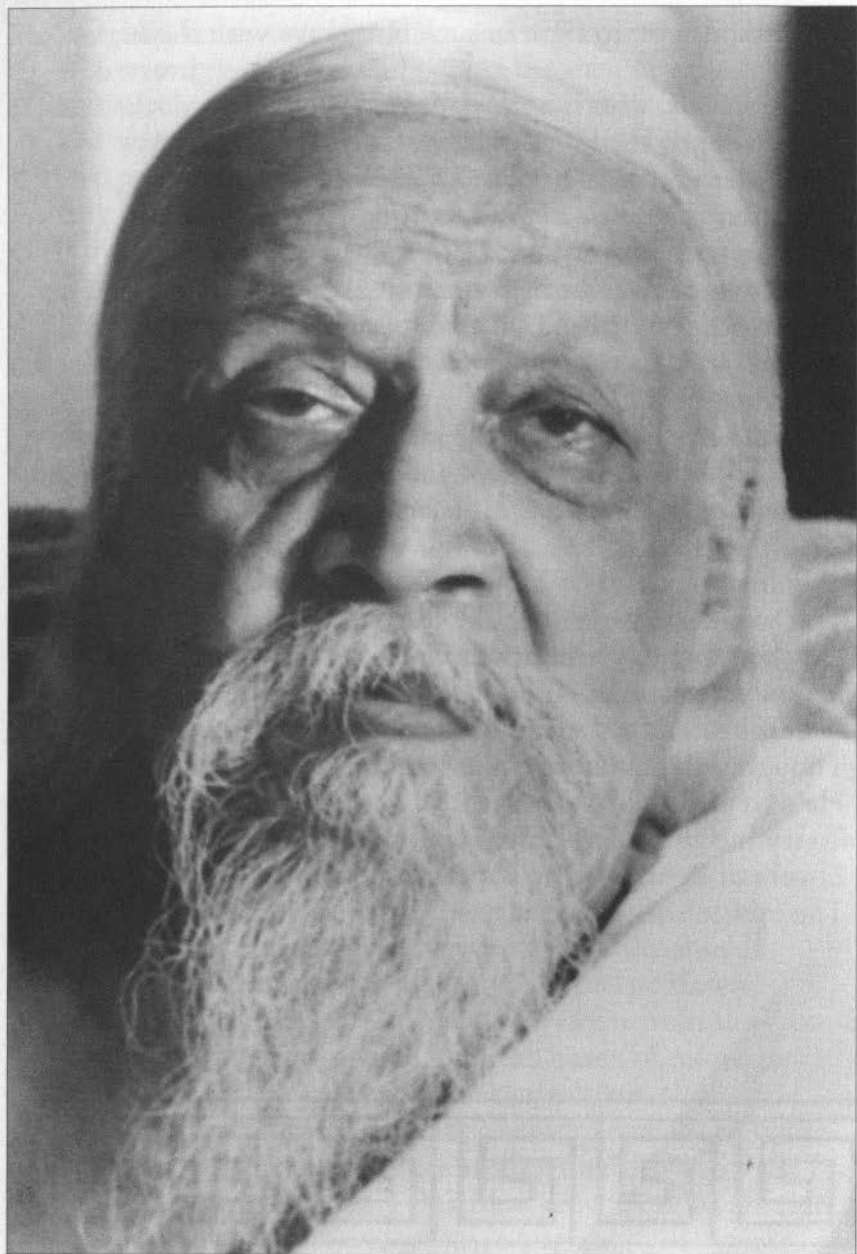
So saying, he left him there, having told him all.
Then at once he dispelled the marvelous mist from the eyes
Of Achilles, who stared hard about him, and much amazed
Spoke thus to his own great heart:

"A miracle, surely!
This wonder my eyes behold. Here lies my spear
On the ground, yet he at whom I so eagerly hurled it
Is nowhere in sight. Truly it seems that Aeneas
Is dear indeed to the immortal gods, though I
Thought his claims were idle and empty. Well, let him go.
He's so glad to be still alive he'll hardly have heart
To try me again. But now I will call to the Danaans,
Lovers of fight, then go forth myself and test
The mettle* of other Trojans.

Translated by Ennis Rees



* Mettle: quality of endurance or courage.



Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo's Ilion

Introduction

If we regard the powers of reality as so many Godheads
we can say that the overmind releases a million godheads
into action, each empowered to create its own world,
each world capable of relation,
communication and interplay with the others

...
Overmind consciousness is global in its cognition and can hold
any number of seemingly fundamental differences together
in a reconciling vision... what to the mental reason are contraries
are to the overmind intelligence complementaries.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*

In Sri Aurobindo's own words, his work on Ilion (then entitled The Fall of Troy, an Epic) was started in Alipur jail' in 1909 and later resumed in Pondichery where he took refuge in April 1910.

The whole work, a long poem written in hexameters,² and left unfinished, was finally published in 1957, seven years after Sri Aurobindo's passing. The opening of the first book alone had been revised by him and published in his Collected Poems and Plays in 1942. Inspired of Homer's Iliad, Ilion covers the events

of one day, the day when the fate of Troy was sealed. It starts at dawn with Talthybius, herald of Argos, arriving at Troy with a proposition of truce sent by Achilles to the Trojan chieftains; a proposition to join forces thus offering the possibility of an harmonious and less destructive process for, as Achilles declares,

Fierce was my heart in my youth and exulted in triumph and
slaughter.

Now as I grow in my spirit like to my kin the immortals,
Joy more I find in saving and cherishing than in the carnage.

But unfortunately, in their pride, the Trojan chieftains refuse a settlement they see as a surrender and prefer to face death and the doom of their beautiful city.

Death and the fire may prevail o'er us, never our wills shall
surrender

Lowering Priam's heights and darkening Ilion's splendors.

So the Trojans get ready for a final battle, and, after parting with their dear ones, arm for the combat while Talthybius returns to Achilles with the following response:

Son of the Aeacids, spurned is thy offer; the pride of thy challenge
Rather we choose; it is nearer to Dardanus, king of the
Hellenes.

Neither shall Helen captive be dragged to the feet of her husband,
Nor down the paths of peace revisit her father Eurotas.

And Achilles, "musing of fate and the wills of men and the purpose of heaven," towards battle turns in his soul. To the wearied Greeks he send his herald with the message that, if need be, he is ready to resume the fight alone, with his army of myrmidons.

But, after a long debate, most of the Greek chieftains favor a last and decisive battle that will see them back to their ships and their beloved homeland.

We are then told of the parting of Achilles and Briseis, and are

reminded of the fate of Achilles who is to find his death at Paris' hand.

Over the sea in my dream an argent bow was extended
Nearing I saw a terror august over moonlit waters,
Cloud and a fear and a face that was young and lovely and hostile.
Then three times I heard arise in the grandiose silence, –
Still was the sky and still was the land and still were the waters, –
Echoing a mighty voice, 'Take back, O king, what you gavest;
Strength take that strong man, sea take thy wave, till the warfare
eternal
Need him again to thunder through Asia's plains to the Ganges.'³

Achilles knows that nothing can alter his fate, fate that the stern gods have planned from the first when the earth was unfashioned. So clasping her against his breast and kissing her for a last time, from her he departed. Leaping in his chariot and shouting his war cry, Achilles rushed Troyward to meet his destiny.

If mythologically the Trojan War follows the abduction of Helen by Paris, historically it is no doubt that the main cause was political, as well as economical. Troy occupied a very important position in the region and was the door to the riches of the Orient. It commanded most trade between East and West and levied heavy taxes on all ships crossing the Hellespont. Therefore, it is only understandable that, in their need for expansion, it became the target of the Greek peoples.

In Sri Aurobindo's poem, the fall of Troy takes an added dimension for, as he reveals to us, the issue at heart is the direction humanity had to take, for its own progress, in the centuries to come. In his address to the gods, Zeus declares,

Twilight thickens over man and he moves to his winter of
darkness.
Troy that displaced with her force and her arms the luminous
ancients
Sinks in her turn by the rudder strength of the half-savage
Achaians.

They to the Hellene shall yield and the Hellene falls by the
Romans.

And, with the following, offers us a great teaching,

Ever since knowledge failed and the ancient ecstasy slackened,
Light has been helper to death and darkness increases the victor.
So shall it last till the fallen ages return to their greatness?
For if the twilight be helped not, night over the world cannot
darken;

Night forbidden how shall a greater dawn be effected?

The fall of Troy certainly marks the end of a long age, known as the Bronze Age. The Dorian invasion which soon followed the Greek victory brought with it a long period of darkness and it will be many centuries before the Greeks, rising out of their ashes like the legendary Phoenix,⁴ developed what has been recognized as the most brilliant civilization of the ancient world.

Mythologically it also marks the end of an extremely long period going back to prehistory in which the object of people's worship had been the Mother Goddess known under many names.⁵ As Aphrodite, addressing her "father" Zeus, and foreseeing the times to come declares,

Only my form he pursues that I wear for a mortal enchantment,
He to whom now you givest the world, the Ionian, the Hellene,
But for my mind is unfit which Babylon worshipped and Sidon
Palely received from the past in images faint of the gladness
Once that was known by the children of men the thrill of their
members
Was the immortal joy of the spirit overflowing their bodies.

And she adds,

Once could my godhead surprise all the stars with the seas of its
rapture;
Once the world in its orbit danced to a marvelous rhythm.

Now shall my waning greatness perish and pass out of Nature.
Earth restored to the Cyclops shall shrink from the gold Aphrodite.

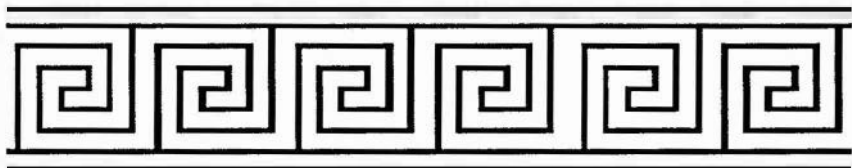
If the reign of the Great Mother is receding, so is the reign of Mystic Apollo. The age of illumination is soon to be replaced by the age of logic and reason inspired and guided by young clear-minded Athena who, we are told, was born directly from her father's head.⁶

Wroth is my splendid heart with the cowering knowledge of
mortals'
Wroth are my burning eyes with the purblind vision of reason.”
Cries Luminous Apollo. But he knows that there will come a
time when,
Jealous for truth to the end my might shall prevail and for ever
Shatter the moulds that men make to imprison their limitless
spirit.

Athena knows that too, and later declares,

This too I know that I pass preparing the paths of Apollo
And at the end as his sister and slave and bride I must sojourn
Rapt to his courts of mystic light and unbearable brilliance.

Presented here is book eight, The Book of the Gods. At their father's call, together with all the other gods, impetuous Ares, lovely Aphrodite, beautiful Apollo and clear-smiling Athene have come to an assembly. Zeus speaks to them "in their soul" and "in their soul" they answer him. Then, looking neither for fruit nor for failure, and in all knowledge, they take their place beside their favorite hero.







Left: Apollo and the Muses. Apollo plays on the lyre while the Muses dance. Attic vase.

Top right: Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love, beauty and fertility. She is supposed to have been washed up on the shore by the waves. (relief c. 470 BC).

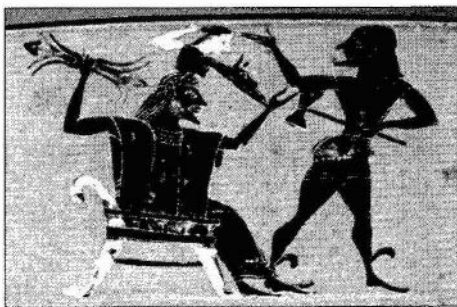
Notes

1. **Alipur:** Soon after his return from England, at the end of the 19th century, Sri Aurobindo became deeply involved with the young nationalist movement that had taken birth in Bengal. On May 1908, following a failed assassination on a British judge, he was arrested and put to jail. During the year he spent in prison (he was acquitted in May 1909) Sri Aurobindo was most of his time in deep meditation and had crucial revelations and experiences. He also composed some poetry that he committed to memory (not being allowed any writing material) and wrote down after being released.
2. **Hexameters:** A line of verse consisting of six metrical feet. The hexameter was very much used by Homer, Virgil and other Greek and Latin poets.
3. **“To thunder through Asia plain to the Ganges”:** With this line Briseis takes us almost a thousand years after the Trojan war when Alexander the Great was to fulfill Achilles’ vision of a unified land going from Xanthus to the Ganges. Exceptional man of war and great visionary, Alexander conquered the whole Persian Empire (334-326 BC) from the Mediterranean to the Indus valley, thus spreading Hellenistic culture throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia.
4. **Phoenix:** A mythical bird of the size of the eagle, and graced with certain features of the pheasant. Legend has it that, when it saw death draw near, it would make a nest of sweet-smelling wood and resins, which it would expose to the full force of the sun’s rays, until it burnt itself to ashes in the flames. Another phoenix would then arise from the marrow of its bones. It came to symbolize destruction and recreation.
5. **“Under many names”:** When the agricultural communities in Greece worshipped Mother Earth they called the Great Goddess or the Mother Goddess by many names, (Gaea, Rhea, Demeter). Most of the female divinities in Greek mythology were originally Great Mother Goddesses; Hera in Argos, Artemis in Crete, Aphrodite in Cyprus. Their role changed when they were incorporated into the male-dominated religion of Zeus. Aphrodite was also known as Ishtar

in Babylon, and as Astarte in what is now Syria and Palestine. In Sumer she was worshiped as Innana, the great cosmic mother. In the Homeric hymns, which reflect the ideals and beliefs of a society predominantly patriarchal, Aphrodite is said to be the daughter of Zeus, but in earlier myth she is said to have sprung from the foam of the sea. Her name, Edith Hamilton writes in her *Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, was explained as meaning "the foam-risen" (*Aphros* meaning foam in Greek).

6. About Athena's birth: Legend tells us that Athena was the favorite child of Zeus and that she sprung directly from his head. Here is a short tale about her birth as told in D' Aulaires *Greek Myths*: "Athena's mother was Metis, goddess of prudence, the first wife of Zeus. He depended on her for he needed her wise council, but Mother Earth warned him that, were Metis to bear him a son, this son would dethrone him. This must not happen, thought Zeus, but he couldn't do without her advice, so he decided to swallow her. Slyly he proposed that they play a game of changing shapes, and Metis, forgetting her prudence, playfully turned herself into all kinds of animals, big and small. Just as she had taken on the shape of a little fly, Zeus opened wide his mouth, took a deep breath, and zip! He swallowed the fly. Ever after Metis sat in his head and guide him from there. Now it happened that Metis was going to have a daughter, and she sat inside Zeus's head hammering out a helmet and weaving a splendid robe for the coming child. Soon Zeus began to suffer from pounding headaches and cried out in agony. All the gods came running to help him, and skilled Hephaestus grasped his tools and spilt open his father's skull. Out sprang Athena, wearing the robe and the helmet, her gray eyes flashing, Thunder roared and the gods stood in awe."

Hephaestus is shown here splitting Zeus's skull open. Athena springs forth fully armed.





Left: Apollo (bronze, 500 BC). This staute portrays the god in the act of receiving an offering.

Right: Athena in war attire (temple of Athena Aphaia on Aegina (510-500 BC)).

The Book of the Gods

Excerpt from Ilion by Sri Aurobindo

So on the earth the seed that was sown of the centuries
ripened;
Europe and Asia, met on their borders, clashed in the Troad.
All over earth men wept and bled and laboured, world-wide
Sowing Fate with their deeds and had other fruit than they
hoped for.
Out of desires and their passionate griefs and fleeting
enjoyments
Weaving a tapestry fit for the gods to admire, who in silence
Joy, by the cloud and the sunbeam veiled, and men know not
their movers.
They in the glens of Olympus, they by the waters of Ida
Or in their temples worshipped in vain or with heart-strings
of mortals
Sated their vast desire and enjoying the world and each other
Sported free and unscourged; for the earth was their prey
and their playground.
But from his luminous deep domain, from his estate of azure
Zeus looked forth; he beheld the earth in its flowering
greenness
Spread like an emerald dream that the eyes have enthroned
in the sunlight,
Heard the symphonies old of the ocean recalling the ages
Lost and dead from its marches salt and unharvested furrows,
Felt in the pregnant hour the unborn hearts of the future.

Troubled kingdoms of men he beheld, the hind in the furrow,
 Lords of the glebe and the serf subdued to the yoke of his
 fortunes,
 Slave-girls tending the fire and herdsmen driving the cattle,
 Artisans labouring long for a little hire in men's cities,
 Labour long and the meagre reward for a toil that is priceless.
 Kings in their seats august or marching swift with their
 armies
 Founded ruthlessly brittle empires. Merchant and toiler
 Patiently heaped up our transient wealth like the ants in
 their hillock.
 And to preserve it all, to protect this dust that must perish,
 Hurting the eternal soul and maiming heaven for some metal
 Judges condemned their brothers to chains and to death and
 to torment,
 Criminals scourgers of crime, – for so are these ant-heaps
 founded, –
 Punishing sin by a worse affront to our crucified natures.
 All the uncertainty, all the mistaking, all the delusion
 Naked were to his gaze; in the moonlit orchards there
 wandered
 Lovers dreaming of love that endures – till the moment of
 treason;
 Helped by the anxious joy of their kindred supported their
 anguish
 Women with travail racked for the child who shall rack them
 with sorrow.
 Hopes that were confident, fates that sprang dire from the
 seed of a moment,
 Yearning that claimed all time for its date and all life for its
 fuel,
 All that we wonder at gazing back when the passion has fallen,
 Labour blind and vain expense and sacrifice wasted,
 These he beheld with a heart unshaken; to each side he studied
 Seas of confused attempt and the strife and the din and the
 crying.

All things he pierced in us gazing down with his eyelids
immortal,
Lids on which sleep dare not settle, the Father of men on his
creatures;
Nor by the cloud and the mist was obscured which baffles
our eyeballs,
But he distinguished our source and saw to the end of our
labour.
He in the animal racked knew the god that is slowly delivered;
Therefore his heart rejoiced. Not alone the mind in its trouble
God beholds, but the spirit behind that has joy of the torture.
Might not our human gaze on the smoke of a furnace, the
burning
Red, intolerable, anguish of ore that is fused in the hell-heat,
Shrink and yearn for coolness and peace and condemn all the
labour?
Rather look to the purity coming, the steel in its beauty,
Rather rejoice with the master who stands in his gladness
accepting
Heat of the glorious god and the fruitful pain of the iron.
Last the eternal gaze was fixed on Troy and the armies
Marching swift to the shock. It beheld the might of Achilles
Helméd and armed, knew all the craft in the brain of
Odysseus,
Saw Deiphobus stern in his car and the fates of Aeneas,
Greece of her heroes empty, Troy enringed by her slayers,
Paris a setting star and the beauty of Penthesilea.
These things he saw delighted; the heart that contains all our
ages
Blessed our toil and grew full of its fruits, as the Artist eternal
Watched his vehement drama staged twixt the sea and the
mountains,
Phrased in the clamour and glitter of arms and closed by the
firebrand,
Act itself out in the blood and in passions fierce on the
Troad.

Yet as a father his children, who sits in the peace of his study
Hearing the noise of his brood and pleased with their play
and their quarrels,
So he beheld our mortal race. Then, turned from the armies,
Into his mind he gazed where Time is reflected and, conscient,
Knew the iron knot of our human fates in their warfare.
Calm he arose and left our earth for his limitless kingdoms.

Far from this lower blue and high in the death-scorning spaces
Lifted above mortal mind where Time and Space are but
figures

Lightly imagined by Thought divine in her luminous stillness,
Zeus has his palace high and there he has stabled his war-car.
Thence he descends to our mortal realms; where the heights
of our mountains

Meet with the divine air, he touches and enters our regions.
Now he ascended back to his natural realms and their rapture,
There where all life is bliss and each feeling an ecstasy
mastered.

Thence his eagle Thought with its flashing pinions extended
Winged through the world to the gods, and they came at the
call, they ascended
Up from their play and their calm and their works through
the infinite azure.

Some from our mortal domains in grove or by far-flowing river
Cool from the winds of the earth or quivering with perishable
fragrance

Came, or our laughter they bore and the song of the sea in
their paces.

Some from the heavens above us arrived, our vital dominions
Whence we draw breath; for there all things have life, the
stone like the ilex,

Clay of those realms like the children of men and the brood
of the giants.

There Enceladus groans oppressed and draws strength from
his anguish

Under a living Aetna and flames that have joy of his entrails.
Fiercely he groans and rejoices expecting the end of his
foemen

Hastened by every pang and counts long Time by his
writhings.

There in the champaigns unending battle the gods and the
giants,

There in eternal groves the lovers have pleasure for ever,
There are the faery climes and there are the wonderful pastures.
Some from a marvellous Paradise hundred-realmed in its
musings

Million-ecstasied, climbed like flames that in silence aspire
Windless, erect in a motionless dream, yet ascending for ever.
All grew aware of the will divine and grew near to their
Father.

Grandiose, calm in her gait, imperious, awing the regions,
Hera came in her pride, the spouse of Zeus and his sister.
As at her birth from the foam of the spaces white Aphrodite
Rose in the cloud of her golden hair like the moon in its halo.
Aegis-bearing Athene, shielded and helmeted, answered
Rushing the call and the heavens thrilled with the joy of her
footsteps

Dumbly repeating her name, as insulted and trampled by
beauty
Thrill might the soul of a lover and cry out the name of its
tyrant.

Others there were as mighty; for Artemis, archeress ancient,
Came on her sandals lightning-tasselled. Up the vast incline
Shaking the world with the force of his advent thundered
Poseidon;

Space grew full of his stride and his cry. Immortal Apollo
Shone and his silver clang was heard with alarm in our
kingdoms.

Ares' impetuous eyes looked forth from a cloud-drift of
splendour;

Themis' steps appeared and Ananke, the mystic Erinnys;
Nor was Hephaestus' flaming strength from his father divided.
Even the ancient Dis to arrive dim-featured, eternal,
Seemed; but his rays are the shades and his voice is the call of
the silence.

Into the courts divine they crowded, radiant, burning,
Perfect in utter grace and light. The joy of their spirits
Calls to eternal Time and the glories of Space are his answer:
Thence were these bright worlds born and persist by the
throb of their heart-beats.
Not in the forms that mortals have seen when assisted they
scatter
Mists of this earthly dust from their eyes in their moments
of greatness
Shone those unaging Powers; nor as in our centuries radiant
Mortal-seeming bodies they wore when they mixed with our
nations.
Then the long youth of the world had not faded still out of
our natures,
Flowers and the sunlight were felt and the earth was glad
like a mother.
Then for a human delight they were masked in this denser
vesture
Earth desires for her bliss, – thin veils, for the god through
them glimmered.
Quick were men's days with the throng of the brilliant
presences near them:
Gods from the wood and the valley, gods from the obvious
wayside,
Gods on the secret hills leaped out from their light on the
mortal.
Oft in the haunt and the grove they met with our kind and
their touches
Seized and subjected our clay to the greatness of passions
supernal,

Grasping the earthly virgin and forcing heaven on this
death-dust.
Glorifying human beauty Apollo roamed in our regions
Clymene when he pursued or yearned in vain for Marpessa;
Glorifying earth with a human-seeming face of the beauty
Brought from her heavenly climes Aphrodite mixed with
Anchises.
Glimpsed in the wilds were the Satyrs, seen in the woodlands
the Graces,
Dryad and Naiad in river and forest, Oreads haunting
Glens and the mountain-glades where they played with the
manes of our lions
Glimmered on death-claimed eyes; for the gods then were
near us and clasped us,
Heaven leaned down in love with our clay and yearned to its
transience.
But we have coarsened in heart and in mood; we have turned
in our natures
Nearer our poorer kindred; leaned to the ant and the ferret.
Sight we have darkened with sense and power we have stifled
with labour,
Likened in mood to the things we gaze at and are in our
vestures:
Therefore we toil unhelped; we are left to our weakness and
blindness.
Not in those veils now they rose to their skies, but like
loose-fitting mantles
Dropped in the vestibules huge of their vigorous realms that
besiege us
All that reminded of earth; then clothed with raiment of
swiftness
Straight they went quivering up in a glory like fire or the
storm-blast.
Even those natural vestures of puissance they leave when
they enter
Mind's more subtle fields and agree with its limitless regions

Peopled by creatures of bliss and forms more true than
earth's shadows, —
Mind that pure from this density, throned in her splendours
immortal
Looks up at Light and suffers bliss from ineffable kingdoms
Where beyond Mind and its rays is the gleam of a glory
supernal:
There our sun cannot shine and our moon has no place for
her lustres,
There our lightnings flash not, nor fire of these spaces is
suffered.
They with bodies impalpable here to our touch and our seeing,
But for a higher delight, to a brighter sense, with more
sweetness
Palpable there and visible, thrilled with a lordlier joyance,
Came to the courts of Zeus and his heavens sang to their
footsteps.
Harmonies flowed through the blissful coils of the kingdoms
of rapture.
Then by his mighty equals surrounded the Thunderer regnant
Veiled his thought in sound that was heard in their souls as
they listened.
Veiled are the high gods always lest there should dawn on
the mortal
Light too great from the skies and men to their destiny
clear-eyed
Walk unsustained like the gods; then Night and Dawn were
defeated
And of their masks the deities robbed would be slaves to
their subjects.

“Children of Immortality, gods who are joyous for ever,
Rapture is ours and eternity measures our lives by his aeons.
For we desireless toil who have joy in the fall as the triumph,
Knowledge eternal possessing we work for an end that is
destined

Long already beyond by the Will of which Time is the courser.
Therefore death cannot alter our lives nor pain our enjoyment.
But in the world of mortals twilight is lord of its creatures.
Nothing they perfectly see, but all things seek and imagine,
Out of the clod who have come and would climb from their
mire to our heavens
Blindly mistaking the throb of their mortal desires for our
guidance.
Yet are the heavenly seats not easy even for the chosen:
Rough and remote is that path; that ascent is too hard for
the death-bound.
Hard are God's terms and few can meet them of men who
are mortal.
Mind resists; their breath is a clog; by their tools they are
hampered.
How shall they win in their earth to our skies who are clay
and a life-wind,
But that their hearts we invade? Our shocks on their lives
come incessant,
Ease discourage and penetrate coarseness; sternness celestial
Forces their souls towards the skies and their bodies by
anguish are sifted.
We in the mortal wake an immortal strength by our tortures
And by the flame of our lightnings choose out the vessels of
godhead.
This is the nature of earth that to blows she responds and by
scourgings
Travails excited; pain is the bed of her blossoms of pleasure.
Earth that was wakened by pain to life and by hunger to
thinking
Left to her joys rests inert and content with her gains and
her station.
But for the unbearable whips of the gods back soon to her
matter
She would go glad and the goal would be missed and the
aeons be wasted

But for the god in their breasts unsatisfied, but for his
 Soon would the hero turn beast and the sage reel back to the
 Man from his difficult heights would recoil and be mud in the
 This by pain we prevent; we compel his feet to the journey.
 But in their minds to impression made subject, by forms of
 Blind is the thought and presumptuous the hope and they
 Blinded are human hearts by desire and fear and possession,
 Darkened is knowledge on earth by hope the helper of

Now too from earth and her children voices of anger and weeping
Beat at our thrones; 'tis the grief and the wrath of fate-stricken
creatures,
Mortals struggling with destiny, hearts that are slaves to
their sorrow.
We unmoved by the cry will fulfil our unvarying purpose.
Troy shall fall at last and the ancient ages shall perish.
You who are lovers of Ilion turn from the moans of her
people,
Chase from your hearts their prayers, blow back from your
nostrils the incense.
Let not one nation resist by its glory the good of the ages.
Twilight thickens over man and he moves to his winter of
darkness.
Troy that displaced with her force and her arms the luminous
ancients,
Sinks in her turn by the ruder strength of the half-savage
Achaians.
They to the Hellene shall yield and the Hellene fall by the
Roman.

Rome too shall not endure, but by strengths ill-shaped shall
be broken,
Nations formed in the ice and mist, confused and
crude-hearted.
So shall the darker and ruder always prevail o'er the brilliant
Till in its turn to a ruder and darker it falls and is shattered.
So shall mankind make speed to destroy what 'twas mighty
creating.
Ever since knowledge failed and the ancient ecstasy
slackened,
Light has been helper to death and darkness increases the
victor.
So shall it last till the fallen ages return to their greatness.
For if the twilight be helped not, night o'er the world cannot
darken;
Night forbidden how shall a greater dawn be effected?
Gods of the light who know and resist that the doomed may
have succour,
Always then shall desire and passion strive with Ananke?
Conquer the cry of your heart-strings that man too may
conquer his sorrow
Stilled in his yearnings. Cease, O ye gods, from the joy of
rebellion.
Open the eye of the soul, admit the voice of the Silence."

So in the courts of Heaven august the Thunderer puissant
Spoke to his sons in their souls and they heard him,
mighty in silence.
Then to her brother divine the white-armed passionless Hera:
"Zeus, we remember; thy sons forget, Apollo and Ares."
"Hera, queen of the heavens, they forget not, but choose to
be mindless.
This is the greatness of gods that they know and can put
back the knowledge;
Doing the work they have chosen they turn not for fruit nor
for failure;

Griefless they walk to their goal and strain not their eyes
towards the ending.
Light that they have they can lose with a smile, not as souls
in the darkness
Clutch at every beam and mistake their one ray for all splendour.
All things are by Time and the Will eternal that moves us,
And for each birth its hour is set in the night or the dawning.
There is an hour for knowledge, an hour to forget and to
labour.”

Great Cronion ceased and high in the heavenly silence
Rose in their midst the voice of the loud impetuous Ares
Sounding far in the luminous fields of his soul as with thunder.
"Father, we know and we have not forgotten. This is our
godhead,
Still to strive and never to yield to the evil that conquers.
I will not dwell with the Greeks nor aid them save forced by
Ananke
And because lives of the great and the blood of the strong
are my portion.
This too thou knowest, our nature enjoys in mankind its
fulfilment.
War is my nature and greatness and hardness, the necks of
the vanquished;
Force is my soul and strength is my bosom; I shout in the
battle
Breaking cities like toys and the nations are playthings of Ares:
Hither and thither I shove them and throw down or range
on my table.
Constancy most I love, nobility, virtue and courage;
Fugitive hearts I abhor and the nature fickle as sea-foam.
Now if the ancient spirit of Titan battle is over, —
Tros fights no more on the earth, nor now Heracles tramples
and struggles,
Bane of the hydra or slaying the Centaurs o'er Pelion driven,
Now if the earth no more must be shaken by Titan

horse-hooves,
Since to a pettier framework all things are fitted consenting,
Yet will I dwell not in Greece nor favour the nurslings of Pallas.
I will await the sons of my loins and the teats of the she-wolf,
Consuls browed like the cliffs and plebeians stern of the
wolf-brood,
Senates of kings and armies of granite that grow by disaster;
Such be the nation august that is fit for the favour of Ares!

They shall fulfil me and honour my mother, imperial Hera.
Then with an iron march they shall move to their world-wide
dominion.
Through the long centuries rule and at last because earth is
impatient.
Slowly with haughtiness perish compelled by mortality's
transience
Leaving a Roman memory stamped on the ages of weakness."
But to his son farsounding the Father high of the Immortals:
"So let it be since such is the will in thee, mightiest Ares:
Thou shalt till sunset prevail, O war-god, fighting for Troya."
So he decreed and the soul of the Warrior sternly consented.
He from his seats arose and down on the summits of Ida
Flaming through Space in his cloud in a headlong glory
descended.
Prone like a thunderbolt flaming down from the hand of the
Father.
Thence in his chariot drawn by living fire and by swiftness.
Thundered down to earth's plains the mighty impetuous
Ares.
Far where Deiphobus stern was labouring stark and
outnumbered
Smiting the Achaian myriads back on the right of the
carnage,
Over the hosts in his car he stood and darkened the Argives.
But in the courts divine the Thunderer spoke to his children:

“Ares resisting a present Fate for the hope of the future
Gods, has gone forth from us. Choose thou thy paths, O my
daughter.
More than thy brother assailed by the night that darkens
o’er creatures.
Choose the silence in heaven or choose the struggle mid
mortals.
Golden joy of the worlds, O thou roseate white Aphrodite.”
Then with her starry eyes and bosom of bliss from the
immortals
Glowing and rosy-limbed cried the wonderful white
Aphrodite,
Drawing her fingers like flowers through the flowing gold of
her tresses,
Calm, discontented, her perfect mouth like a rose of
resistance
Chidingly budded gainst Fate, a charm to their senses
enamoured.
“Well do I know thou hast given my world to Hera and
Pallas.
What though my temples shall stand in Paphos and island
Cythera
And though the Greek be a priest for my thoughts and a lyre
for my singing,
Beauty pursuing and light through the figures of grace and
of rhythm, –
Forms shall he mould for men’s eyes that the earth has
forgotten and mourns for.
Mould even the workings of Pallas to commune with
Paphia’s sweetness.
Mould Hephaestus’ craft in the gaze of the gold Aphrodite, –
Only my form he pursues that I wear for a mortal
enchantment,
He to whom now thou givest the world, the Ionian, the Hellene,
But for my might is unfit which Babylon worshipped and
Sidon

Palely received from the past in images faint of the gladness
Once that was known by the children of men when the thrill
of their members
Was but the immortal joy of the spirit overflowing their
bodies,
Wine-cups of God's desire; but their clay from my natural
greatness
Falters betrayed to pain, their delight they have turned into
ashes.
Nor to my peaks shall he rise and the perfect fruit of my
promptings,
There where the senses swoon but the heart is delivered by
rapture;
Never my touch can cling to his soul nor reply from his
heart-strings.
Once could my godhead surprise all the stars with the seas
of its rapture;
Once the world in its orbit danced to a marvellous rhythm.
Men in their limits, gods in their amplitudes answered my
calling;
Life was moved by a chant of delight that sang from the
spaces,
Sang from the Soul of the Vast, its rapture clasping its creatures.
Sweetly agreed my fire with their soil and their hearts were
as altars.
Pure were its crests; 'twas not dulled with earth, 'twas not
lost in the hazes
Then when the sons of earth and the daughters of heaven
together
Met on lone mountain peaks or, linked on wild beach and
green meadow
Twining embraced. For I danced on Taygetus' peaks and o'er
Ida
Naked and loosing my golden hair like a nimbus of glory
O'er a deep-ecstasied earth that was drunk with my roses
and whiteness.

There was no shrinking nor veil in our old Saturnian
kingdoms.
Equals were heaven and earth, twin gods on the lap of Dione.
Now shall my waning greatness perish and pass out of
Nature.
For though the Romans, my children, shall grasp at the
strength of their mother,
They shall not hold the god, but lose in unsatisfied orgies
Yet what the earth has kept of my joy, my glory, my puissance,
Who shall but drink for a troubled hour in the dusk of the
sunset
Dregs of my wine Pandemian missing the Uranian sweetness.
So shall the night descend on the greatness and rapture of
living;
Creeds that refuse shall persuade the world to revolt from its
mother.
Pallas' adorers shall loathe me and Hera's scorn me for
lowness;
Beauty shall pass from men's work and delight from, their
play and their labour;
Earth restored to the Cyclops shall shrink from the gold
Aphrodite.
So shall I live diminished, owned but by beasts in the forest,
Birds of the air and the gods in their heavens, but disgraced
in the mortal."
Then to the discontented rosy-mouthed Aphrodite
Zeus replied, the Father divine: "O goddess Astarte,
What are these thoughts thou hast suffered to wing from
thy rose-mouth immortal?
Bees that sting and delight are the words from thy lips,
Cytherea.
Art thou not womb of the world and from thee are the
thronging of creatures?
And didst thou cease the worlds too would cease and the
aeons be ended.
Suffer my Greeks; accept who accept thee. O gold Dionaeon.

They in the works of their craft and their dreams shall
enthroned thee for ever,
Building thee temples in Paphos and Eryx and island Cythera,
Building the fane more enduring and bright of thy golden
ideal.
Even if natures of men could renounce thee and God do
without thee,
Rose of love and sea of delight, O my child Aphrodite,
Still wouldst thou live in the worship they gave thee
protected from fading,
Splendidly statued and shrined in men's works and men's
thoughts, Cytherea."

Pleased and blushing with bliss of her praise and the thought
of her empire
Answered, as cries a harp in heaven, the gold Aphrodite:
“Father. I know and I spoke but to hear from another my
praises.
I am the womb of the world and the cause of this teeming of
creatures,
And if discouraged I ceased, God’s world would lose heart
and would perish.
How will you do then without me your works of wisdom
and greatness,
Hera, queen of heaven, and thou, O my sister Athene?
Yes, I shall reign and endure though the pride of my
workings be conquered.
What though no second Helen find a second Paris,
Lost though their glories of form to the earth, though their
confident gladness
Pass from a race misled and forgetting the sap that it sprang
from.
They are eternal in man in the worship of beauty and rapture.
Ever while earth is embraced by the sun and hot with his kisses
And while a Will supernal works through the passions of
Nature,

Me shall men seek with my light or their darkness, sweetly
or crudely,
Cold on the ice of the north or warm in the heats of the
southland,
Slowly enduring my touch or with violence rapidly burning.
I am the sweetness of living, I am the touch of the Master.
Love shall die bound to my stake like a victim adorned as for
bridal,
Life shall be bathed in my flames and be purified gold or be
ashes.
I, Aphrodite, shall move the world for ever and ever.
Yet now since most to me, Father of all, the ages arriving,
Hostile, rebuke my heart and turn from my joy and my
sweetness.
I will resist and not yield, nor care what I do, so I conquer.
Often I curbed my mood for your sakes and was gracious
and kindly,
Often I lay at Hera's feet and obeyed her commandments
Tranquil and proud or o'ercome by a honeyed and ancient
compulsion
Fawned on thy pureness and served thy behests, O my sister
Pallas.
Deep was the love that united us, happy the wrestle and
clasping;
Love divided, Love united, Love was our mover.
But since you now overbear and would scourge me and chain
and control me,
War I declare on you all, O my Father and brothers and sisters.
Henceforth I do my will as the joy in me prompts or the
anger.
Ranging the earth with my beauty and passion and golden
enjoyments
All whom I can, I will bind; I will drive at the bliss of my
workings,
Whether men's hearts are seized by the joy or seized by the
torture.

Most I will plague your men, your worshippers and in my
malice
Break up your works with confusion divine, O my mother
and sister;
Then shall you fume and resist and be helpless and pine with
my torments.
Yet will I never relent but always be sweet and malignant.
Cruel and tyrannous, hurtful and subtle, a charm and a torture.
Thou too, O father Zeus, shalt always be vexed with my
doings;
Called in each moment to judge thou shalt chafe at our cry
and our quarrels,
Often grope for thy thunderbolt, often frown magisterial
joining in vain thy awful brows o'er thy turbulent children.
Yet in thy wrath recall my might and my wickedness, Father;
Hurt me not then too much lest the world and thyself too
should suffer.
Save, O my Father, life and grace and the charm of the senses:
Love preserve lest the heart of the world grow dulled and
forsaken."
Smiling her smile immortal of love and of mirth and of malice
White Aphrodite arose in her loveliness armed for the conflict.
Golden and careless and joyous she went like a wild bird that
winging
Flits from bough to bough and resumes its chant interrupted.
Love where her white feet trod bloomed up like a flower
from the spaces;
Mad round her touches billowed incessantly laughter and
rapture.
Thrilled with her feet was the bosom of Space, for her
amorous motion
Floated a flower on the wave of her bliss or swayed like the
lightning.
Rich as a summer fruit and fresh as Spring's blossoms her body
Gleaming and blushing, veiled and bare and with ecstasy
smiting

Burned out rosy and white through her happy ambrosial
raiment,
Golden-tressed and a charm, her bosom a fragrance and peril.
So was she framed to the gaze as she came from the seats of
the Mighty,
So embodied she visits the hearts of men and their dwellings
And in her breathing tenement laughs at the eyes that can
see her.
Swift-footed down to the Troad she hastened thrilling the
earth-gods.
There with ambrosial secrecy veiled, admiring the heroes
Strong and beautiful, might of the warring and glory of
armour,
Over her son Aeneas she stood, his guard in the battle.

But in the courts divine the Thunderer spoke mid his children:
"Thou for a day and a night and another day and a nightfall,
White Aphrodite, prevail; o'er thee too the night is extended.
She has gone forth who made men like gods in their glory
and gladness.
Now in the darkness coming all beauty must wane or be
tarnished;
Joy shall fade and mighty Love grow fickle and fretful;
Even as a child that is scared in the night, he shall shake in
his chambers.
Yet shall a portion be kept for these, Ares and white Aphrodite.
Thou whom already thy Pythoness bears not, torn by thy
advent,
Caverned already who sittest in Delphi knowing thy future,
What wilt thou do with the veil and the night, O burning
Apollo,"
Then from the orb of his glory unbearable save to immortals
Bright and austere replied the beautiful mystic Apollo:
"Zeus, I know that I fade; already the night is around me.
Dusk she extends her reign and obscures my lightnings with
error.

Therefore my prophets mislead men's hearts to the ruin
appointed.
Therefore Cassandra cries in vain to her sire and her brothers.
All I endure I foresee and the strength in me waits for its
coming:
All I foresee I approve; for I know what is willed, O Cronion.
Yet is the fierce strength wroth in my breast at the need of
approval
And for the human race fierce pity works in my bosom;
Wroth is my splendid heart with the cowering knowledge of
mortals,
Wroth are my burning eyes with the purblind vision of reason.
I will go forth from your seats and descend to the night
among mortals
There to guard the flame and the mystery; vast in my
moments
Rare and sublime to sound like a sea against Time and its
limits,
Cry like a spirit in pain in the hearts of the priest and the poet,
Cry against limits set and disorder sanities bounded.
Jealous for truth to the end my might shall prevail and for ever
Shatter the moulds that men make to imprison their limitless
spirits.
Dire, overpowering the brain I shall speak out my oracles
splendid.
Then in their ages of barren light or lucidity fruitful
Whenso the clear gods think they have conquered earth and
its mortals,
Hidden God from all eyes, they shall wake from their dream
and recoiling
Still they shall find in their paths the fallen and darkened
Apollo."
So he spoke, repressing his dreadful might in his bosom,
And from their high seats passed, his soul august and
resplendent
Drawn to the anguish of men and the fierce terrestrial labour.

Down he dropped with a roar of light invading the regions,
And in his fierce and burning spirit intense and uplifted
Sure of his luminous truth and careless for weakness of mortals

Flaming oppressed the earth with his dire intolerant beauty.
Over the summits descending that slept in the silence of heaven,

He through the spaces angrily drew towards the tramp and the shouting
Over the speeding of Xanthus and over the pastures of Troya.

Clang of his argente bow was the wrath restrained of the mighty,

Stern was his pace like Fate's; so he came to the warfare of mortals

And behind Paris strong and inactive waited God's moment
Knowing what should arrive, nor disturbed like men by their hopings.

But in the courts of Heaven Zeus to his brother immortal
Turned like a menaced king on his counsellor smiling augustly:
“Seest thou, Poseidon, this sign that great gods revolting
 have left us,
Follow their hearts and strive with Ananke? Yet though they
 struggle,
Thou and I will do our will with the world, O earth-shaker.”
Answered to Zeus the besieger of earth, the voice of the
 waters:
“This is our strength and our right, for we are the kings and
 the masters.
Too much pity has been and yielding of Heaven to mortals.
I will go down with my chariot drawn by my thunder-maned
 coursers
Into the battle and thrust down Troy with my hand to the
 silence,
Even though she cling round the snowy knees of our child
 Aphrodite

Or with Apollo's sun take refuge from Night and her shadows.
I will not pity her pain, who am ruthless even as my surges.
Brother, thou knowest, O Zeus, that I am a king and a trader;
For on my paths I receive earth's skill and her merchandise gather.
Traffic richly in pearls and bear the swift ships in my bosom.
Blue are my waves and they call men's hearts to wealth and adventure.
Lured by the shifting surges they launch their delight and their treasures
Trusting the toil of years to the perilous moments of Ocean.
Huge man's soul in its petty frame goes wrestling with Nature
Over her vasts and his fragile ships between my horizons
Buffeting death in his solitudes labour through swell and through storm-blast
Bound for each land with her sons and watched for by eyes in each haven.
I from Tyre up to Gades trace on my billows their trade-routes
And on my vast and spuming Atlantic suffer their rudders.
Carthage and Greece are my children, the marts of the world are my term-posts.
Who then deserves the earth if not he who enriches and fosters?
But thou hast favoured thy sons, O Zeus; O Hera, earth's sceptres
Still were denied me and kept for strong Ares and brilliant Apollo.
Now all your will shall be done, so you give me the earth for my nations.
Gold shall make men like gods and bind their thoughts into oneness;
Peace I will build with gold and heaven with the pearls of my caverns."

Smiling replied to his brother's craft the mighty Cronion:
"Lord of the boundless seas, Poseidon, soul of the surges,
Well thou knowest that earth shall be seized as a booth for
the trader.
Rome nor Greece nor France can drive back Carthage for
ever.
Always each birth of the silence attaining the field and the
movement
Takes from Time its reign; for it came for its throne and its
godhead.
So too shall Mammon take and his sons their hour from the
ages.
Yet is the flame and the dust last end of the silk and the iron,
And at their end the king and the prophet shall govern the
nations.
Even as Troy, so shall Babylon flame up to heaven for the
spoiler
Wailed by the merchant afar as he sees the red glow from the
Ocean."
Up from the seats of the Mighty the Earth-shaker rose; his
raiment
Round him purple and dominant rippled and murmured
and whispered,
Whispered of argosies sunk and the pearls and the Nereids
playing,
Murmured of azure solitudes, sounded of storm and the
death-wail.
Even as the march of his waters so was the pace of the sea-god
Flowing on endless through Time; with the glittering symbol
of empire
Crowned were his fatal brows; in his grasp was the wrath of
the trident,
Tripled forces, life-shattering, brutal, imperial, sombre.
Resonant, surging, vast in the pomp of his clamorous greatness
Proud and victorious he came to his home in the far-spuming
waters.

Even as a soul from the heights of thought plunges back into
living,
So he plunged like a rock through the foam; for it falls from
a mountain
Overpeering the waves in some silence of desolate waters
Left to the wind and the sea-gull where Ocean alone with
the ages
Dreams of the calm of the skies or tosses its spray to the
wind-gods,
Tosses for ever its foam in the solitude huge of its longings
Far from the homes and the noises of men. So the dark-
browed Poseidon
Came to his coral halls and the sapphire stables of Nereus
Ever where champ their bits the harnessed steeds of the
Ocean
Watched by foam-white girls in the caverns of still
Amphitrite.
There was his chariot yoked by the Tritons, drawn by his
coursers
Born of the fleeing sea-spray and shod with the north-wind
who journey
Black like the front of the storm and clothed with their
manes as with thunder.
This now rose from its depths to the upper tumults of
Ocean
Bearing the awful brows and the mighty form of the sea-god
And from the roar of the surges fast o'er the giant margin
Came remembering the storm and the swiftness wide
towards the Troad.
So among men he arrived to the clamorous labours of Ares,
Close by the stern Diomedes stood and frowned o'er the
battle.
He for the Trojan slaughter chose for his mace and his
sword-edge
Iron Tydeus' son and the adamant heart of young Pyrrhus.

But in the courts divine the Father high of the immortals
Turned in his heart to the brilliant offspring born of his musings.
She who tranquil observes and judges her father and all things.
“What shall I say to the thought that is calm in thy breasts,
O Athene?
Have I not given thee earth for thy portion, throned thee
and armoured,
Darkened Cypris’ smile, dimmed Hera’s son and Latona’s?
Swift in thy silent ambition, proud in thy radiant sternness,
Girl, thou shalt rule with the Greek and the Saxon, the
Frank and the Roman.
Worker and fighter and builder and thinker, light of the reason,
Men shall leave all temples to crowd in thy courts, O
Athene.
Go then and do my will, prepare man’s tribes for their
fullness.”

But with her high clear smile on him answered the mighty
Athena.
Wisely and soberly, tenderly smiled she chiding her father
Even as a mother might rail at her child when he hides and
dissembles:
"Zeus, I see and I am not deceived by thy words in my spirit.
We but build forms for thy thought while thou smilest down
high o'er our toiling;
Even as men are we tools for thee, who are thy children and
dear ones.
All this life is thy sport and thou workst like a boy at his
engines
Making a toil of the game and a play of the serious labour.
Then to that play thou callest us wearing a sombre visage,
This consulting, that to our wills confiding, O Ruler;
Choosing thy helpers, hastened by those whom thou lurest
to oppose thee

Guile thou usest with gods as with mortals, scheming,
And at the wrath and the love thou hast prompted laughtest
So we too who are sisters and enemies, lovers and rivals,
Fondled and baffled in turn obey thy will and thy cunning,
I, thy girl of war, and the rosy-white Aphrodite.
Always we served but thy pleasure since our immortal
Always each other we helped by our play and our wrestlings
This too I know that I pass preparing the paths of Apollo
And at the end as his sister and slave and bride I must
Rapt to his courts of mystic light and unbearable brilliance.
Was I not ever condemned since my birth from the toil of
Seized like a lyre in my body to sob and to laugh out his
Shake as a leaf in his fierceness and leap as a flame in his
So must I dwell overpowered and so must I labour subjected
Robbed of my loneliness pure and coerced in my radiant
Now whose clearness and pride are the sovereign joy of thy
Such the reward that thou keepst for my labour obedient
Yet I work and I do thy will, for 'tis mine, O my Father."
Proud of her ruthless lust of thought and action and battle,
Swiftfooted rose the daughter of Zeus from her sessions
Breasts of the morning unveiled in a purity awful and candid,
Head of the mighty Dawn, the goddess Pallas Athene!
Strong and rapacious she swooped on the world as her prey
and her booty

Down from the courts of the Mighty descending, darting on
Ida.
Dire she descended, a god in her reason, a child in her
longings, –
Joy and woe to the world that is given to the whims of the
child-god
Greedy for rule and play and the minds of men and their
doings!
So with her aegis scattering light o'er the heads of the
nations
Shining-eyed in her boyish beauty severe and attractive
Came to the fields of the Troad, came to the fateful warfare,
Veiled, the goddess calm and pure in her luminous raiment
Zoned with beauty and strength. Rejoicing, spurring the
fighters
Close o'er Odysseus she stood and clear-eyed governed the
battle.

Zeus to Hephaestus next, the Cyclopean toiler
Turned, Hephaestus the strong-souled, priest and king and a
bond-slave,
Servant of men in their homes and their workshops, servant
of Nature,
He who has built these worlds and kindles the fire for a
mortal.
“Thou, my son, art obedient always. Wisdom is with thee,
Therefore thou know'st and obeyest. Submission is wisdom
and knowledge;
He who is blind revolts and he who is limited struggles:
Strife is not for the infinite; wisdom observes to accomplish.
Troy and her sons and her works are thy food today, O
Hephaestus.”
And to his father the Toiler answered, the silent Seer:
“Yes, I obey thee, my Father, and That which thou is
more mighty;
Even as thou obeyest by rule, so I by my labour.

Now must I heap the furnace, now must I toil at the smithy,
I who have flamed on the altar of sacrifice helping the sages.
I am the Cyclops, the lamester, who once was pure and a
high-priest.
Holy the pomp of my flames ascendent from pyre and from
altar
Robed men's souls for their heavens and my smoke was a
pillar to Nature.
Though I have burned in the sight of the sage and the heart
of the hero,
Now is no nobler hymn for my ear than the clanging of metal,
Breath of human greed and the dolorous pant of the engines.
Still I repine not, but toil; for to toil was I yoked by my
Maker.
I am your servant, O Gods, and his of whom you are servants."
But to the Toiler Zeus replied, to the servant of creatures:
"What is the thought thou hast uttered betrayed by thy
speech, O Hephaestus?
True is it earth shall grow as a smithy, the smoke of the
furnace
Fill men's eyes and their souls shall be stunned with the
clang of the hammers,
Yet in the end there is rest on the peak of a labour
accomplished.
Nor shall the might of the thinker be quelled by that iron
oppression,
Nor shall the soul of the warrior despair in the darkness
triumphant,
For when the night shall be deepest, dawn shall increase on
the mountains
And in the heart of the worst the best shall be born by my
wisdom.
Pallas thy sister shall guard man's knowledge fighting the
earth-smoke.
Thou too art mighty to live through the clamour even as
Apollo.

Work then, endure; expect from the Silence an end and thy
wages.”
So King Hephaestus arose and passed from the courts of his
father;
Down upon earth he came with his lame omnipotent
motion;
And with uneven steps absorbed and silent the Master
Worked employed mid the wheels of the cars as a smith in
his smithy,
But it was death and bale that he forged, not the bronze and
the iron.
Stark, like a fire obscured by its smoke, through the
spear-casts he laboured
Helping Ajax’ war and the Theban and Phocian fighters.
Zeus to his grandiose helper next, who proved and unmoving,
Calm in her greatness waited the mighty command of her
husband:
“Hera, sister and spouse, what my will is thou knowest, O
consort.
One are our blood and our hearts, nor the thought for the
words of the speaker
Waits, but each other we know and ourselves and the Vast
and the heavens,
Life and all between and all beyond and the ages.
That which Space not knows nor Time, we have known, O
my sister.
Therefore our souls are one soul and our minds become
mirrors of oneness.
Go then and do my will, O thou mighty one, burning down
Troya.”
Silent she rose from the seats of the Blissful, Hera majestic,
And with her flowing garment and mystical zone through
the spaces
Haloed came like the moon on an evening of luminous silence
Down upon Ida descending, a snow-white swan on the
greenness,

Down upon Ida the mystic haunted by footsteps immortal
Ever since out of the Ocean it rose and lived gazing towards
heaven.
There on a peak of the mountains alone with the sea and the
azure
Voiceless and mighty she paused like a thought on the
summits of being
Clasped by all heaven; the winds at play in her gust-scattered
raiment
Sported insulting her gracious strength with their turbulent
sweetness,
Played with their mother and queen; but she stood absorbed
and unheeding,
Mute, with her sandalled foot for a moment thrilling the
grasses,
Dumbly adored by a soul in the mountains, a thought in the
rivers,
Roared to loud by her lions. The voice of the cataracts falling
Entered her soul profound and it heard eternity's rumour.
Silent its gaze immense contained the wheeling of aeons.
Huge-winged through Time flew her thought and its
grandiose vast revolutions
Turned and returned. So musing her timeless creative spirit,
Master of Time its instrument, grieflessly hastening forward
Parted with greatnesses dead and summoned new strengths
from their stables;
Maned they came to her call and filled with their paces the
future.
Calm, with the vision satisfied, thrilled by the grandeurs
within her,
Down in a billow of whiteness and gold and delicate raiment
Gliding the daughter of Heaven came to the earth that
received her
Glad of the tread divine and bright with her more than with
sunbeams.
King Agamemnon she found and smiling on Sparta's levies

Mixed unseen with the far-glinting spears of the haughty
Mycenae.

Then to the Mighty who tranquil abode and august in his
regions

Zeus, while his gaze over many forms and high-seated
godheads

Passed like a swift-fleeing eagle over the peaks and the glaciers
When to his eyrie he flies alone through the vastness and
silence:

“Artemis, child of my loins and you, O legioned immortals,
All you have heard. Descend, O ye gods, to your sovereign
stations,

Labour rejoicing whose task is joy and your bliss is creation;
Shrink from no act that Necessity asks from your luminous
natures.

Thee I have given no part in the years that come, O my
daughter,
Huntress swift of the worlds who with purity all things
pursuest.

Yet not less is thy portion intended than theirs who o’erpass
thee:

Helped are the souls that wait more than strengths soon
fulfilled and exhausted.

Archeress, brilliance, wait thine hour from the speed of the
ages.”

So they departed, Artemis leading lightning-tasselled.

Ancient Themis remained and awful Dis and Ananke.

Then mid these last of the gods who shall stand when all
others have perished,

Zeus to the Silence obscure under iron brows of that
goddess, –

Griefless, unveiled was her visage, dire and unmoved and
eternal:

“Thou and I, O Dis, remain and our sister Ananke.

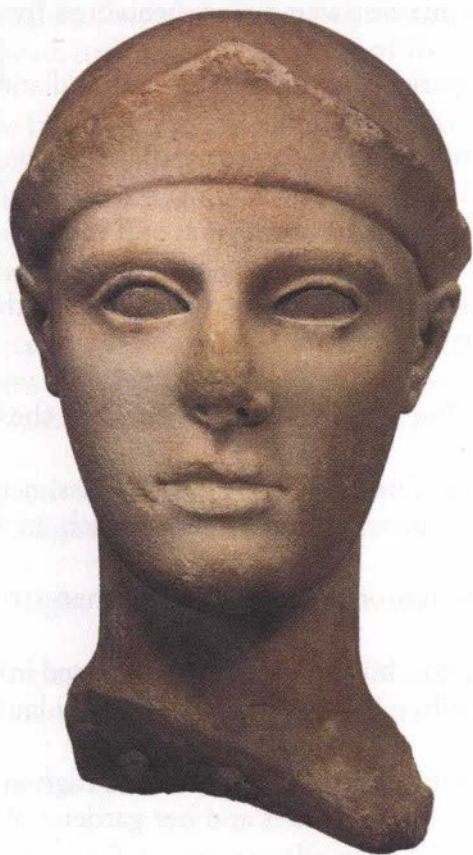
That which the joyous hearts of our children, radiant
 heaven-moths
Flitting mid flowers of sense for the honey of thought, have
 not captured,
That which Poseidon forgets mid the pomp and the roar of
 his waters,
We three keep in our hearts. By the Light that I watch for
 unsleeping,
By thy tremendous consent to the silence and darkness, O
 Hades,
By her delight renounced and the prayers and the worship of
 mortals
Making herself as an engine of God without bowels or
 vision, –
Yet in that engine are only heart-beats, yet is her riddle
Only Love that is veiled and pity that suffers and slaughters,
We three are free from ourselves, O Dis, and free from each
 other.
Do then, O King of the Night, observe then with Time for
 thy servant
Not my behest, but What she and thou and I are for ever.”

Mute the Darkness sat like a soul unmoved through the
 aeons,
 Then came a voice from the silence of Dis, from the night
 there came wisdom.
 “Yes, I have chosen and that which I chose I endure, O
 Cronion, –
 Though to the courts of the gods I come as a threat and a
 shadow,
 Even though none to their counsels call me, none to their
 pastime,
 None companions me willingly; even thy daughter, my
 consort,
 Trembling whom once from our sister Demeter I plucked
 like a blossom

Torn from Sicilian fields, while Fate reluctant, consenting,
Bowed her head, lives but by her gasps of the sun and the
azure;
Stretched are her hands to the light and she seeks for the
clasp of her mother.
I, I am Night and her reign and that of which Night is a
symbol.
All to me comes, even thou shalt come to me, brilliant
Cronion.
All here exists by me whom all walk fearing and shunning;
He who shuns not, He am I and thou and Ananke.
All things I take to my bosom that Life may be swift in her
voyage;
For out of death is Life and not by birth and her motions
And behind Night is light and not in the sun and his
splendours.
Troy to the Night I will gather a wreath for my shadows, O
grower."
So in his arrogance dire the vast invincible Death-god
Triumphing passed out of heaven with Themis and silent
Ananke.
Zeus alone in the spheres of his bliss, in his kingdom of
brilliance
Sat divine and alarmed; for even the gods in their heavens
Scarce shall live who have gazed on the unveiled face of
Ananke,
Heard the accents dire of the Darkness that waits for the
ages.
Awful and dull grew his eyes and mighty and still grew his
members,
Back from his nature he drew to the passionless peaks of the
spirit,
Throned where it dwells for ever uplifted and silent and
changeless
Far beyond living and death, beyond Nature and ending of
Nature.

There for a while he dwelt veiled, protected from Dis and his
greatness;
Then to the works of the world he returned and the joy of
his musings.
Life and the blaze of the mighty soul that he was of God's
making
Dawned again in the heavenly eyes and the majestied
semblance.
Comforted heaven he beheld, to the green of the earth was
attracted.

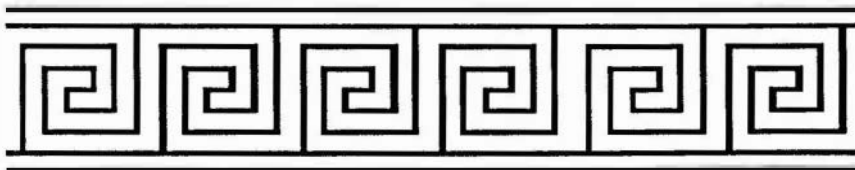
But through this Space unreal, but through these worlds that
are shadows
Went the awful Three. None saw them pass, none felt them.
Only in the heavens was a tread as of death, in the air was a
winter,
Earth oppressed moaned long like a woman striving with
anguish.
Ida saw them not, but her grim lions cowered in their caverns,
Ceased for a while on her slopes the eternal laughter of
fountains.
Over the ancient ramparts of Dardanus' high-roofed city
Darkening her victor domes and her gardens of life and its
sweetness
Silent they came. Unseen and unheard was the dreadful
arrival.
Troy and her gods dreamed secure in the moment flattered
by sunlight.
Dim to the citadel high they arrived and their silence invaded
Pallas' marble shrine where stern and white in her beauty,
Armed on her pedestal, trampling the prostrate image of
darkness
Mighty Athene's statue guarded imperial Troya.
Dim and vast they entered in. Then through all the great city
Huge a rushing sound was heard from her gardens and
places

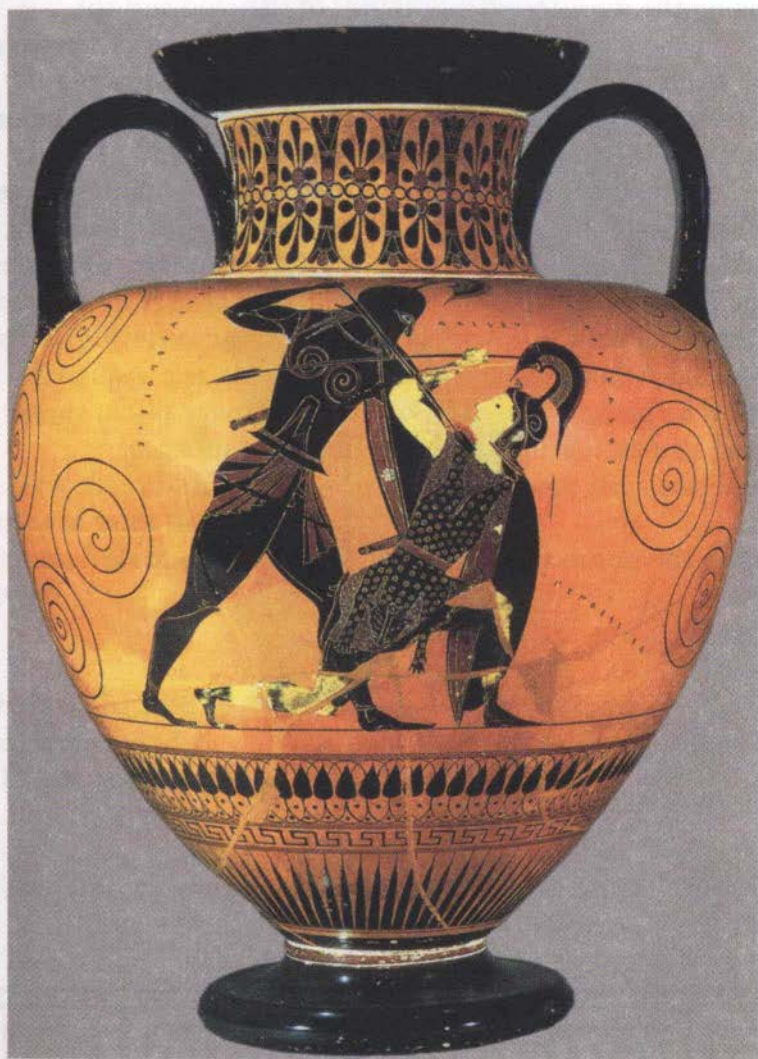


And in their musings her seers as they strove with night and
with error
And in the fane of Apollo Laocoon torn by his visions
Heard aghast the voice of Troy's deities fleeing from Troya,
Saw the flaming lords of her households drive in a
death-rout
Forth from her ancient halls and their noble familiar
sessions.
Ghosts of her splendid centuries wailed on the wings of the
doom-blast.

Moaning the Dryads fled and his Naiads passed from
Leaving the world to deities dumb of the clod and the
And from their tombs and their shrines the shadowy
Filled was the air with their troops and the sound of a vast
Wailing they went, lamenting mortality's ages of greatness,
Ruthless Ananke's deeds and the mortal conquests of Hades.
Then in the fane Palladian the shuddering priests of Athene
Entered the darkened shrine and saw on the suffering marble
Shattered Athene's mighty statue prostrate as conquered,
But on its pedestal rose o'er the unhurt image of darkness
Awful shapes, a Trinity dim and dire unto mortals.
Dumb they fell down on the earth and the life-breath was
And in the noon there was night. And Apollo passed out of
Troya.

taken from *Iliad* – Book VIII – “The Book of the Gods”
by Sri Aurobindo
(Centenary Edition, Pondicherry : 1972), pp. 492-512)





Achilles slaying the Amazon queen Penthesilea

Glossary of proper names & Greek and Latin terms

Achaians or Achaeans: the name by which the first Indo-European occupants of Greece, prior to the Dorian invasion, were collectively known; perhaps originally a specific tribe. It is the common Homeric term for the Greeks.

Achilles: son of Peleus (king of Phthia and a grandson of Zeus) and Thetis, a sea goddess. He was the mightiest Greek hero in the Trojan War. In his infancy, his mother dipped him into the Styx and so made him invulnerable except in the heel by which she held him. She later tried to prevent him from participating in the war by disguising him as a girl on Scyros. Discovered there by Odysseus, he came to Troy of his own free will and not as a vassal of Agamemnon. With his army of Myrmidons he took many towns in the Troad, including Lyrnessus where he captured Breseis. When Agamemnon took Breseis from him, Achilles withdrew with his warriors from the battle, but he soon returned to avenge the death of his friend Patroclus by slaying Hector. In Ilium he had again retired from combat, but not for the traditional reason of his mourning for Patroclus. He returns to the fight, considerably mellowed in temper but with new ambitions prophetic of Alexander the Great, only after the Trojans reject his offer of peace and his request for Polyxena's hand. He is destined in his last battle to slay the Amazon queen Penthesilea and to die, shot in the heel, at the hands of Paris aided by Apollo.

Aegis: attribute of Zeus and, later, Athene; it is represented variously as a goatskin cloak, breastplate or shield, often bordered with flames or serpents, and possessing supernatural power.

Aeneas, son of Anchises and the goddess Aphrodite. He is one of the leading Trojan princes, belonging to the younger branch of the royal house. In *Ilium* allusion is made to the legend of his escape from Troy at the time of its fall and his journey to Italy where he founded what came to be known as Rome.

Aetna: Mount Etna, an active volcano in northeast Sicily, beneath which the giant Enceladus was said to be buried.

Agamemnon: eldest son of Atreus and brother of Menelas. King of Mycenae and Argos. Agamemnon was the commander in chief of the Greek forces against Troy. On his return to Greece, he was murdered by his wife Clymnestra and her paramour Aegisthus; his death was avenged by his children.



Agamemnon's funeral mask

Ajax: son of Telamon, he was also called the Telamonian Ajax. He was the leader of the warriors of Salamis and is already slain by Penthesilea at the opening of *Iliou*.

Amphitrite: one of the Nereids, queen of the sea, wife of Poseidon and mother of Triton.

Ananke: personification of compelling Necessity or ultimate Fate to which even Zeus and the gods are subject.

Anchises: a member of the younger branch of the Trojan royal house and, in Iliou, a Trojan senator. He had a liaison with Aphrodite on Mount Ida and Aeneas was born. Anchises was forbidden to speak of the liaison, but boasted of it to his friends. As a result he was according to different versions either blinded or lamed (in Iliou, he is shown as blind). After the fall of Troy, he was taken away by Aeneas to Italy, where he died.



Aphrodite (4th century BC)



Apollo

Aphrodite: Greek goddess of love, beauty and fertility. She was the daughter of Zeus and Dione according to Homer. In another account, she arose from the foam of the sea that gathered around the severed genital organ of Uranus when his son Cronus, the Titan, mutilated him. She instigated the abduction of Helen by Paris; in the war which resulted, she aids her son Aeneas and the Trojans.

Apollo: Greek god of music, poetry, archery and prophecy, son of Zeus and Latona; originally a god of the sun and mystic illumination (see also his epithets Phoebus and Loxias); sometimes identified with Helios. His chief oracle was at Delphi. With Poseidon he built the walls of Troy for Laomedon. He was on the side of the Trojans in the war despite Laomedon's treachery, but in *Iliad* he finally deserts the city, though he stands behind Paris in the battle, leaving it open to destruction by the Greeks.

Ares: the Greek war-god, identified with the Roman Mars. The Greeks had a less exalted conception of him than the Romans, however, tending to see him as a mere instigator of strife. He was the son of Zeus and Hera, and sided with the Trojans against the Greeks.

Argives: name used for the Greeks of Argos, also extended to refer to all the Greeks under the leadership of Agamemnon.

Artemis: Greek goddess, daughter of Zeus and Latona and the twin sister of Apollo. She was described in mythology as a virgin huntress and sometimes identifies



Artemis
(Cyprus, 2nd century
BC)

with the moon. In Ilion she receives a deeper interpretation: she is a power of the future and, with her lightning-tasseled sandals, seems to represent the swift and luminous faculty of intuition.

Astarte: The name of the Semitic goddess of fertility, beauty and love. Applied to Greek Aphrodite.

Athene: goddess of reason and skill who sprang, unmothered, from the forehead of Zeus. Depicted as a woman of severe beauty in armour, she is a virgin warrior but fights, not like Ares for the sheer assertion of strength and love of battle, but to uphold the right and establish order. She is also known as Pallas. Her statue, the Palladium, stood in Troy, but Athene herself aided the Greeks and especially Odysseus, her favourite.

Babylon: Ancient city on the Euphrates, one of the greatest and most prosperous cities in the ancient world.

Breseis: Daughter of Briseus, a man of Lyrnessus in Troad. Breseis became Achilles' slave-concubine when he sacked her town, killed her husband Mynes, king of Lyrnessus, and carried her off. She was later taken from Achilles by Agamemnon. This act set off the quarrel between the two which forms the central "problem" of the *Iliad*. She was eventually restored to Achilles.

Cassandra: The most beautiful daughter of Priam and Hecuba, king and queen of Troy. She was loved by Apollo but deceived him. In retaliation the god turned to a curse the gift of prophecy he had bestowed on her, causing her prophecies never to be believed.

Centaurs: Fabulous creatures, for the



Cassandra, being slayed by Ajax in Athena's temple. Apollo is seen behind.

most part of a wild and unruly nature, have the upper part of a human being and the lower part of a horse.

Climene: Wife of Merops, king of Ethiopia. She was beloved of the Sun and bore to him Phaethon, who later tried to drive his father's chariot and nearly destroyed the earth.

Cronion: Zeus (son of Cronos).

Cronos or Cronus: Father of Zeus. The youngest of the twelve titans, children of Gaea, the Earth, and Uranus the Sky. Father of six Greek gods: Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Demeter and Hestia. He swallowed each of his own children at birth, but Zeus escaped. After a protracted struggle he and the other titans were vanquished.

Cyclops: One of a family of gigantic one eyed-being who, like the titans, were son of Uranus and Gaea (Heaven and Earth) and older than the Olympian gods. They were the craftsmen of Haephaestus, made the thunderbolts of Zeus and were credited with erecting the fortifications of some ancient cities.



A Cyclops carrying a pile of rocks (6th century BC)

Cypris: An epithet of Aphrodite, whose sanctuaries on the island of Cyprus was especially renown.

Cythera: An island of the Southeast promontory of the Peloponnesus on which there was a sanctuary of Aphrodite. According to one legend, Aphrodite floated to Cythera on a seashell after her birth in the sea.

Danaans: The men of Argos (descendants of Danaus).

Danaus: Legendary king of Argos with fifty daughters, regarded as ancestor of the Argives or Danaans.

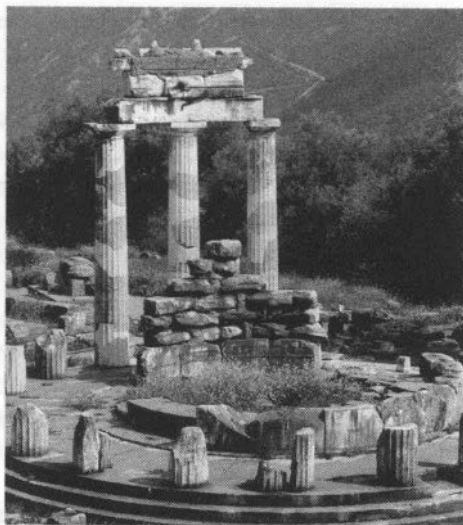
Dardanus: Son of Zeus and Electra, the daughter of Atlas; ancestor of both the younger and older branches of the royal house of Troy.

Deiphobus: A son of Priam and Hecuba, and a great Trojan hero

Delos: A small island in the center of the Cyclades in the southern Aegean; it was regarded as the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis (twin children of Zeus from Leto or Latona) and was the seat of an oracle of Apollo.

Delphi: A rugged spot on the slopes of Mount Parnassus in central Greece, the site of the most important temple of Apollo, where the Pythia delivered the inspired messages of the god.

Demeter: Daughter of Cronos and Rhea, sister of Zeus, Demeter was an ancient goddess of agriculture and of the fruitful soil. Wheat and barley were sacred to



The remains of a monument at Delphi



Demeter and her daughter Persephone, with ears of corn

her. She was called "*thesmophoros*", "who gives laws", and presided over marriage. Of a severe beauty, she was often portrayed dressed in a long robe, wearing a veil, sometimes crowned with ears of corn and holding in her hand a sceptre, ears of corn, or a torch.

Diomedes: One of the most respected Greek leaders in the Trojan war.

Dionaeon: An epithet of Aphrodite



Dionysus Attic cup, c. 480 BC

Dione: Original consort of Zeus, supplanted by Hera, and mother of Aphrodite according to Homer.

Dionysus: In origin Dionysus was simply the god of wine; afterwards he became god of vegetation and warm moisture; then he appeared as the god of pleasure and the god of civilisation; and finally according to Orphic conceptions, as supreme god.

Dis: The Roman name for the Greek Pluto or Hades, the god of the nether realm.

Dryads: Nymphs of the woods and trees.

Enceladus: One of the giants who waged war against the gods. He was hurled down by Athene and imprisoned beneath Mount Etna in Sicily. When he stirs, the mountain shakes, and when he breathes, there is an eruption.

Erinnyes: One of the Furies (*Erinnyes*), spirits of vengeance and punishment. The *Erinnyes*, older than Zeus and Olympian gods, are commonly represented as winged women with snakes about them.

Eryx: The modern Erice, a town on top of Monte San Giuliano in northwest Sicily. Its ancient temple to Aphrodite was famous through the Mediterranean world.

Fury: *see* Erinnyes.

Ganymede: Ancient astronomers identified him with Aquarius, the Water-bearer. Distinguished among mortals for his extraordinary beauty, Zeus had him swept up to Olympus by an eagle. There he became the cup-bearer of the gods.

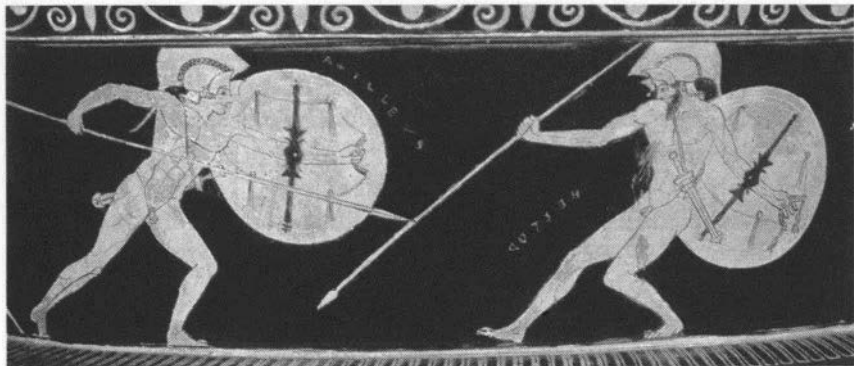
Gorgons: In the westernmost extremities of the earth, says Aeschylus, "dwell monsters abhorred by mortals, with locks of serpents whom none looked upon without perishing." They were the Gorgons, three sisters out of whom Medusa alone was mortal. Perseus, in his quest, had to kill Medusa which he did with the help of Athene. Later on, Athene fixed the Gorgon's head at the center of her breast-plate, the Aegis.

Grace: Goddess of the beauty, brightness and joy in Nature and humanity.

Hecate: Native of ancient Thrace, she was originally a moon goddess. Her name seems to be a feminine form of a title of Apollo, "the far darter". She and Helios together witnessed the abduction of Persephone by Hades. Hecate was powerful both in the sky and on earth. She gave men richness, victory and wisdom. She was also



Medusa head



Hector and Achilles face to face (6th century BC)

known as the goddess of enchantments and magic. It was especially at crossroads that her image could be found, often with three faces (called triple Hecates) and on the eve of the full moon offerings would be left to propitiate the redoubtable goddess.

Hector: The eldest son of Priam and Hecuba and mightiest of the Trojan forces during the siege until his death. When *Ilion* opens he has already been slain by Achilles (in one of the best-known episodes of the *Iliad*).

Hecuba: The chief wife of Priam and mother of nineteen of his fifty sons (many of them slain before the action of *Ilion*) as well as several daughters.

Helen: Daughter of Zeus and Leda, who was the wife of Tyndareus, king of Sparta; Helen was wife of Menelaus, 'Tyndareus' successor by their marriage, but was carried off to Troy by Paris. She was the most beautiful of women. As she had many suitors, Tyndareus had each of them take an oath swearing to come to the aid of the man chosen as her husband. It was this oath that brought many Greek princes and their armies to Troy to support Menelaus' cause.

Helios: The sun-god. He is conceived as a charioteer who drives daily from east to west across the sky. He was replaced by Apollo in late Greek and Roman mythology.

Hellenes: The name, originally, of a tribe which settled in Phthia in the southeast of Thessaly; it later developed into the national name of the Greeks. The Hellenes traced their descent to Hellen, grandson of Prometheus. In *Ilion*, the word usually describes Achilles and his men, who came, from Phthia.

Hellespont: Narrow strait dividing Europe from Asia at the final exit of the waters of the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara into the Aegean; the modern Dardanelles.

Hephaestus: God of fire (originally, maybe of the sacrificial fire in particular, later the smithy fire) and of labour and craftsmanship. He is a son of Zeus and Hera and is usually depicted as lame. It was he who, after the death of Patroclus, asked by Thetis, Achilles' mother, forged Achilles' marvelous new shield and armor making him almost invincible.

Hera: Consort and sister of Zeus and queen of the heavens; identified with the Roman Juno. In *Ilion* she is a sublime figure devoid of the passions of jealousy and vanity attributed to her in Greek mythology. Her will is one with that of her spouse, and therefore she works for the destruction of Troy. Ares and Hephaestus are her sons.

Heracles: Hercules (his Latin name), the mightiest and most famous of Greek heroes. He was given twelve great labours the accomplishment of which would make him immortal. One of the labours, referred to in *Ilion*, was that of killing the Hydra. In *Ilion* reference is also made to a fight which Heracles had with the Centaurs who, maddened with wine, attacked him.



The First Labour of Heracles is shown on this cup, where he kills the lion of Nemea.

Hermes: Son of Zeus and Maia, daughter of the titan Atlas; Hermes was born in the depth of a cave on Mount Cyllene in Arcadia. He had many functions: protector of the home, god of the travellers; he was also charged with conducting the souls of the dead to the underworld. In Homer, Hermes appears as the messenger of Zeus and is often charged with delicate missions. In order to rapidly cross the celestial spaces, Hermes wears winged sandals. He sometimes adds wings to his hat to aid his flight. In Iliad, help-bringing Hermes is sent by Zeus to escort old Priam to Achilles without being seen by the Achaean sentinels. In the same fashion, he also helped the old king and his herald get away from the ships, in the dead of night to bring back to Troy the dead body of the king's son Hector.

Hydra: In Greek mythology, a poisonous water-snake with many heads, which multiplied when they were cut off. It was killed by Heracles, with the help of Iolaus, as one of his twelve labors.

Ida: A mountain in northwest Asia Minor, southeast of the site of ancient Troy. It was a seat of Zeus, who directed the Trojan War from there.

Ilion: or Ilium, a name of Troy as the city of Ilus.

Ionians: A section of the ancient Greek people; they inhabited the south of Greece before the Dorian invasion sent many of them across the Aegean to the central part of Asia minor, which became known as "Ionia".

Laocoon: Trojan prince, son of Priam and priest of Apollo. He prophesies that Troy shall triumph and spurs the Trojans on to their destruction.

Laomedon: A legendary king of Troy, grandson of Tros and father of Priam. He employed Apollo and Poseidon to build the walls of Troy, but cheated them of their payment, as a result of which Poseidon sent a sea monster to ravage the land. Heracles killed the monster, but he too was refused the reward Laomedon had promised him, whereupon Heracles attacked Troy and slew Laomedon and all his sons except Priam. Laomedon's grave lay over the Scaean Gate of Troy, the northwestern gate which, when opened, signified war.

Latona: Latin equivalent of Leto, daughter of the Titans Coeus and Phoebe. She had a union with Zeus, but when she was due to give birth, no land would receive her for fear of the wrath of Hera until she reached the island of Delos in the Cyclades. There Apollo and Artemis were born to her.

Leleges: one of the peoples who helped Troy fight the Greeks. Priam married Laothoe, and daughter of the Lelege king, Altes. From her he had two sons, Lycaon and Polydorus, both killed by Achilles during the Trojan war.

Lesbos: Greek island in the Aegean sea; also known as Mytilene.

Lycaon: Son of Priam to the Lelege princess Laothoe, Lycaon was once captured in his father's orchard to be sold as a slave on sacred Lemnos. Ransomed and taken back to Troy, he met Achilles once more after the death of Patroclus, by the river Xanthus, and this time, although unarmed and begging for his death, is killed by him.

Marpessa: Daughter of Euenus, son of Ares. Idas, an Argonaut, had won Marpessa as his bride, but she was carried off by Apollo. Zeus intervened in the fight which ensued and offered her a choice between the two. She chose Idas.

Menelaus: Younger brother of Agamemnon and husband of Helen. He was the king of Sparta, succeeding Tyndareus, Helen's foster-father, to the throne, and led the Spartan contingent against Troy.

Mycenae: City in the northeast corner of the plain of Argos, ruled by Agamemnon. It was one of the chief centers of the Aegean world in the latter part of the second millennium BC.

Myrmidons: A warlike tribe, supposedly turned into men from ants by Zeus to repopulate the island of Aegina (the kingdom of his son Aeacus, Achilles' grandfather) after a plague. They later migrated to Phthia, and Achilles was their leader in the Trojan war.

Nereids: the daughters of the sea-god Nereus, and of Doris. They were nymphs who presided over the sea, protecting sailors in distress.

Nymphs: Any of the minor divinities of Nature in classical mythology represented as beautiful maidens dwelling in the mountains, forests, trees and water.

Oceanus: The primitive Greeks imagined an immense river which formed a liquid girdle around the Universe. It lay beyond the sea and embraced the sea without however mingling with its waters. Son of Uranus and of Gaea, the river Ocean or Oceanus had himself neither source nor outlet, but gave birth to all the rivers, the entire sea, to all the waters which gushed from the earth, to all deep wells. Oceanus married his sister Thetis and by her had the three thousand oceanids (nymphs of the sea) and the three thousand rivers.



The famous Trojan horse, a huge wooden horse secretly filled with Greek warriors, was an idea of Odysseus.

Odysseus: Son and successor of Laertes, king of Ithaca, and leader of the Ithacan contingent against Troy. He was famous as a cunning and resourceful warrior and wise counselor and was especially favoured by Athene.

Olympians: The twelve high gods of Greek religion, so named because they dwelt on Mount Olympus.

Olympus: Mountain at the east end of the range forming the northern boundary of Thessaly and Greece proper. It was regarded as the home of the chief Greek gods, led by Zeus.

Oreads: Nymphs of the mountains and hills.

Orpheus: A legendary pre-Homeric Thracian poet and musician, founder of the Orphic mysteries, who was able to charm even wild beasts and birds by his music.

Palladium: an ancient sacred image of Athene which was the guardian of a city. The Palladium of Troy is especially famous.

Pallas: A title of Athene, of uncertain meaning and origin.

Pandemian: Of Pandemos, "goddess of all the people", an epithet of Aphrodite.

Paphos: A city a short distance inland from the west coast of Cyprus and the site of a famous temple of Aphrodite.

Paris: A son of Priam and Hecuba, was reputed to be the handsomest of mortal men. Hence, in the quarrel over the golden apple, inscribed "For the fairest", thrown down by Strife at the wedding of Peleus, he was asked to be the judge between Hera, Athene and Aphrodite, who all claimed it. Hera promised him greatness if he chose her, Athene offered victory, and Aphrodite the most beautiful woman. He awarded the apple to Aphrodite (thereby incensing the other two) who helped him to obtain Helen. Paris was left exposed on a mountain after his birth because of a prophecy that he would bring destruction to Troy, but was brought up by shepherds and later accepted by his parents. He was allowed, despite further prophecies, to sail to Sparta where he carried Helen off and thus caused the Trojan War. He was the slayer of Achilles and was slain by Philoctetes.

Peleus: Son of Aeacus, who was a son of Zeus, and king of Phthia. For his virtue he was given as wife the sea goddess Thetis, who bore him Achilles.

Pelion: Mountain in Thessaly, northern Greece. It was the legendary home of the centaurs.

Penthesilea: Amazon queen, daughter of Ares. She came to the aid of the Trojans in the last year of the war after Hector was killed and gave them new hope, slaughtering the Greeks who fought without Achilles. Her beauty was such that it is told that when Achilles,

finally killing her in battle, removed her helmet and looked on her face, he fell wildly in love with her and was filled with remorse.

Persephone: It is believed that the last part of the name Persephone comes from a word meaning “to show” and evokes an idea of light. Whether the first part comes from a word meaning “to destroy” (in which case Persphone would mean “she who destroyed the light”) or from an adverbial root meaning “dazzling light” like in Perseus, it is not clear. She was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter. First known under the name of Kore, (The Maiden) she took the name Persphone after her abduction by Hades. As goddess of the underworld her attributes were the bat, the narcissus and the pomegranate.

Phoebus: Titan.

Poseidon: Greek god of the sea, also of earthquakes and horses; brother of Zeus and wielder of the trident. With Apollo, he built the walls of Troy for Laomedon, whose failure to pay for the work turned Poseidon against the Trojans.

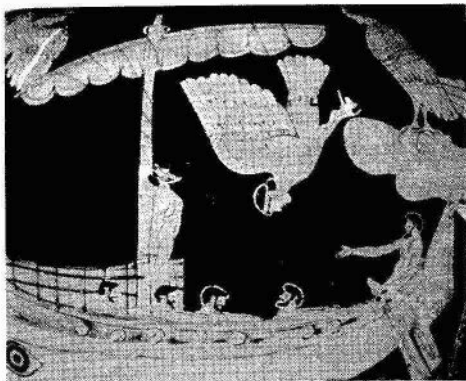
Priam: Son of Laomedon and king of Troy. In *Ilion*, he is pictured as an old man of imposing presence who has retired from active rule.

Pyrrhus: an alternative name for Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles.

Rhea: Born to Gaea and Uranus she was one of the twelve titans. An earth goddess, like her mother, she gave birth to Hestia, Demeter and Hera. She also bore Hades, Poseidon and Zeus. Legend says that she saved Zeus, her last born from his father Cronos (who was in the habit of swallowing his children as soon as they were born) by presenting him with an enormous stone wrapped up in swaddling clothes which he swallowed instead.

Satyrs: Sylvan deities representing the luxuriant forces of Nature, having partly a human, partly an animal appearance (either that of a horse or a goat). They are lustful and fond of revelry.

Scamander: The river near whose banks Troy was situated, the modern Menderes, rising on Mount Ida and emptying into the Dardanelles; also called the Xanthus.



**Odysseus
and the sirens**

Sidon: The oldest city of ancient Phoenicia, the modern Saida in Lebanon.

Simois: A small river near ancient Troy, a tributary of the Scamander.

Sirens: According to legend, the sirens were depicted as malevolent monsters of the sea, enticing sailors with the beauty of their voices to better devour them when their vessels shipwrecked on their rocky islands. They were represented with the head and bust of a woman and the body of a bird. In the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus is about to leave Circe on whose island he and his companions have been stranded for a year, she warns him of the dangers ahead; “First thou shalt arrive where the enchanter sirens dwell, they who seduce men. The imprudent man who draws near them never returns, for the sirens, lying in the flower-strewn field, will charm him with sweet songs; but around them the bodies of their victims lie in heaps”. Odysseus escaped that fearful danger by having himself lashed to the mast of his ship; as for his companions, he had cautiously sealed their ears with wax.

Sparta: City-State, south Peloponnesus, Sparta was the kingdom of Tyndareus, foster-father of Helen. Menelaus succeeded him to the throne and led the Spartan contingent against Troy.

Taygetus: Highest Mountain range in the Peloponnesus.

Themis: Titaness who came to personify law and justice; her name probably meant “steadfast”.

Thetis: A sea goddess, one of the Nereids. She was desired by Zeus, but he learned that she was destined to have a son who would be greater than his father. He consequently gave her in marriage to Peleus, king of Phthia, to whom she bore Achilles.

Thrace: Region situated in the Balkan Peninsula; ancient Thrace extended to the Danube and included what is now modern Turkey (European side).

Titans: Immortal children born to Gaia (the earth) and Uranus (the sky), the titans form what the Greeks called "the first race". There were twelve of them, six male and six female: Oceanus, Coeus, Hyperion, Crius, Iapetus, Cronus, Theia, Rhea, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, Thetys and Themis. Cronus married his sister Rhea and fathered three daughters: Hestia, Demeter and Hera; and three sons: Hades, Poseidon and Zeus. When Zeus reached manhood he liberated his brothers and sisters who according to legend had been swallowed by their father as soon as they were born. Then began ten-year-long terrible struggle between the titans and the gods at the end of which the gods prevailed. The titans, defeated, were bound with chains and cast for eternity into Tartarus, the abysmal depths of the earth.

Triton: son of Poseidon. He was a sea creature like a merman, the upper half of his body being human, the lower half fishlike.

Troad: A territory in the northwest corner of Asia Minor surrounding Troy, its capital city.

Trojans: The people of Troy.

Troy: Ancient city in northwest Asia Minor, which was situated a few miles south of the Aegean entrance to the Hellespont (Dardanelles) on a mound commanding the triangular plateau between the rivers Scamander and Simois. In the second millennium BC, it was the strongest power on the coast of Asia Minor and its location gave it control over trade between the Aegean and the Black Sea; the Trojan War (1200 BC) may have actually been fought by the Greeks mainly to destroy this control. Excavations have discovered on the site of Troy a series of towns one above the other dating back to the third millennium BC. The city of Priam, named after Tros and also known



The ruins of Troy

as Ilium or Ilion, was built on the ruins of earlier cities and was surrounded by a massive wall erected, according to Greek legend, by Poseidon and Apollo for Laomedon. The Trojans, according to the Greeks, traced their descent through Dardanus to Zeus and considered their city to be inviolable because of the presence of the Palladium.

Xanthus: The river Scamander or, as in Homer, the god of that river.

Zeus: The supreme god in Greek religion; son of Cronus, the Titan, whom he overthrew. He decrees all that shall be, subject only to the mysterious power of Ananke. The lord of the heavens, he has as his special manifestations in Nature thunder, lightning and tempest. He is regarded as the universal father, though mythology makes him the actual father (by a variety of goddesses and mortal women besides his consort Hera) of only some of the gods and certain extraordinary human beings such as Helen, Sarpedon and Dardanus. The fall of Troy is the inscrutable will of Zeus which even the gods cannot prevent, though they are free to struggle against it. By his command, the gods withdrew from the fighting during the last year of the Trojan War, resuming their participation only when Achilles returned to battle.

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Zeus

Suggestions for further reading

- Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*. Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, volume 10. Pondicherry: 1972
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Man's dedication to the quest for meaning is certainly as old as his existence on earth, and the belief in gods, in whatever form, has been present in all cultures of the world since time immemorial, even though questioned and denied from time to time. All over the world, the spiritual foundation of a society is reflected in a body of myths which are symbols of human experience each culture values and preserves because they embody its world-view or important beliefs.

Myths may explain origins, natural phenomena and death. They may provide models of virtuous or heroic behaviour by relating the adventures of great heroes, or they may describe the nature and function of divinities. They impart a feeling of awe for whatever is mysterious and marvelous in life, depicting a universe in which human beings take their place in a much larger scale, and may reveal much more deeply than any rationalistic rendering the very structure of the divinity; divinity who stands beyond all attributes, and gathers all contraries. "God is day and night, winter and summer; war and peace, hunger and satiety: all opposites are in him," would say Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher of the 5th century BC. The questions myths address have produced a body of stories from diverse cultures that often closely resemble each other in subject, although the treatment of each theme naturally varies from one society to another. Forming a bridge across time and space, they are like an open window on the mind of the people who created them, allowing us to better access deeper layers of their psyche. "The mind of the European", wrote Sri Aurobindo, "is an Iliad and an Odyssey, fighting rudely but heroically forward, or full of a rich curiosity (...) The mind of the Asiatic is a Ramayan or a Mahabharat, a gleaming infinity of splendid and inspiring imaginations and idealism, or else a universe of wide moral aspiration, ever new masses of thought."

